



PHD

The Role of Literature in Post-Soviet Russia, 1996-2008

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Award date:
2010

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The Role of Literature in Post-Soviet Russia, 1996-2008

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath
Department of European Studies and Modern Languages

November 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank both the University of Bath and the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies for providing the funding which allowed the completion of this thesis. Particular thanks must go to my supervisor, Rosalind Marsh, whose advice, expertise, and support have been invaluable. I extend my gratitude to David Gillespie as second supervisor, for offering a different perspective on literature in post-Soviet Russia. I am indebted to the library staff at the University of Leeds for allowing me access to their Russian newspaper collection and to various contacts in Russia who introduced me to numerous 'new' Russian writers. I must also thank William Ellis; without his computer programming ability the process of data collection would have been far longer and more arduous. Thanks must also go to close friends; to Abby Henson and Kelly Loft, to Claire Hyland, Marianne Sundlisaeter Skinner and Charlotte Boichat who appreciate the trials and triumphs of attempting to produce a completed thesis; and to the Leeds girls, who have always believed that I would finish my thesis one day! My parents, brother and grandmother deserve special thanks for their words of support and encouragement throughout this project. My final thanks go to Ed, for his unfailing love and patience and for his unshakeable faith in my abilities, even when I doubted myself.

ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the impact that the disintegration of the Soviet Union had on the role of literature in post-Soviet Russia between 1996 and 2008. The fate of Russian literature became a hotly debated topic after 1991 and among academics and literary critics fears about its quality were widespread. In the immediate post-Soviet period, all eyes were focused on Russia's writers, and in the light of the new-found political freedom, many commentators, both Western and Russian, eagerly anticipated the emergence of new, even greater Russian literature. When this 'new' Russian literature failed to appear in the forms that the intelligentsia expected, and poor quality, mass-produced 'trash' gained supremacy in the book market, many declared Russian literature dead and turned away to explore other aspects of post-Soviet life. As a result, since the mid-1990s, there has been comparatively less written about Russian literature and the predictions of the early part of the first post-Soviet decade have not, to a greater or lesser extent, been revisited. This thesis seeks to provide further information about the ways in which the Russian literary scene has changed between 1996 and 2008, after the intense scrutiny of the outside world diminished and commentators became occupied with other aspects of post-Soviet life and leisure time.

In an attempt to understand the way in which the changing political and economic landscape has affected the role that literature plays in Russia, this thesis draws on a number of case studies to provide a picture of the Russian literary scene between 1996 and 2008. Chapter One explores the changing face of the book market through the experiences of three publishing houses: *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks*, each of which has different origins and has navigated the uncharted waters of an emerging market economy with relative degrees of success. Chapter Two focuses on the 'thick' literary journals. The 'thick' journals played an active role in the Soviet Union, particularly in the latter part of the 1980s, when the circulation of each publication soared as readers sought to keep abreast of the latest developments socially, politically and culturally. *Novyi mir* (*New world*) and *Znamya* (*Banner*) are the case studies in Chapter Two, and their changing fortunes are explored in the context of the Soviet era and in comparison to the 'glossy' journal, *Afisha* (*Billboard*), which has been published in Russia since 1999. No study of Russian literature would be complete without some consideration of the influence of politics on the sorts of texts that are published. Chapter Three questions the extent to which the Putin regime represented a return to a 'cult of personality', a phrase that started

to reappear on the pages of Russia's newspapers when Putin came to power. Texts by three authors: Dmitrii Bykov (1967-); Viktor Teterin (1981-); and Maksim Kononenko (1971-) are used in order to explore how far literature and politics remain intertwined even in an era when there is so-called democracy operating within Russia. The fourth chapter investigates how the role of the writer has changed since 1996, and the ways in which popular literary genres have risen to prominence in spite of the intelligentsia's attempts to preserve the quality of literature. The experiences of writers Boris Akunin (1956-) and Oksana Robski (1968-), along with their respective series *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998 to the present) and *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) will be examined in Chapter Four.

All translations from Russian, with the exception of *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-) and *Ca\$ual* (2005), are my own. A modified version of the British Standard system of transliteration without diacritics is used. In the text, surnames ending in 'yi' and 'ii' are rendered as 'y', and the surnames of prominent figures, such as Yeltsin, and well-known Russian terms such as *glasnost* appear in the familiar, rather than in the more strictly transliterated forms. However, when quoting directly from other sources, parity has been retained with the original, even if this means rendering the same term differently owing to differences in the system of transliteration.

PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS

- Paper in preparation: 'The Publishing Environment in Twenty-First-Century Russia.' Conference proceedings from 'Russia in 2010: Sources of Stability and Change' – CEELBAS Conference. University of Bath, June 2010.
- Published article: 'The Russian Woman's Guide to Surviving the Post-Soviet Era.' *eSharp special postgraduate edition*, Summer 2008.
http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_92501_en.pdf

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The collapse of the Soviet Union heralded the end of decades of censorship, ideological manipulation and limited freedom.¹ It saw the disintegration of the centrally-planned, rigidly-controlled economy, which outlined what the Soviet Republics would produce in any given year. Literature was no exception. The ideological stance of the regime affected the production, circulation and consumption of literature, whether officially-sanctioned or subversive. The key role of Soviet authorised literature was to present the reader with a model view of the Soviet Union, encouraging adherence to the Soviet way of thinking and belief in the Communist utopia. Furthermore, literature of the pre-Soviet period was re-evaluated in the light of the altered political stance, and texts which had previously been freely available became subject to the censor's pen. As N. N. Shneidman points out: 'the state supported culture, and the arts and literature, in turn, promoted the political and ideological stance of the party' (1995, p.6). Conversely, 'unofficial' literature produced (though not always circulated) in the Soviet era sought to make readers aware of the flaws and injustices of the Soviet regime. The significance that the authorities attributed to literature was reflected by the intelligentsia and the subsequent demise of the Soviet Union prompted numerous questions about the future of Russian literature and what role it would play in an era of relative political freedom.

¹ See Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991* (1997) for further details about how levels of censorship fluctuated. Although the Soviet leadership was primarily concerned with censoring the press in the early part of the Soviet period, there was some censorship of literature prior to 1930, which 'seriously crippled creative writing' (1997, p.50). In the 1930s and early 1940s, censorship 'intensified and spread over some areas previously unaffected or only slightly touched by it' (1997, p.51). This trend continued in the post-war period, when literature was 'totally subordinated to the political aims of the day', which aimed to 'crush the aspirations of the intelligentsia for more political and creative freedom' (1997, pp.99-100). In spite of the 'thaw', which allowed writers to 'tackle previously forbidden themes' (1997, p.141), constraints on literature remained until well into the 1980s. The changes which occurred under Gorbachev are relatively well-known; not least among them was the publication of numerous works that had previously been rejected. In 1990 the Law on the Press and Other Media was passed. It 'declared the censorship of news inadmissible', but retained the right to close down any media outlet that divulged state secrets or demanded the overthrow or change of the state system (1997, p.228).

This thesis will argue that literature continues to play a significant role in post-Soviet Russia, and it will focus on four particular functions that literature has performed since 1996: commercial; political; educational; and the provision of a basis for debate about literature and its value. By examining a number of areas relating to literature, this thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the role of literature has changed (or stayed the same) between 1996 and 2008. The areas through which the role of literature will be examined are publishing; journals; politics in literature; and the writer and popular literature. These areas were chosen partly because of the varying amounts of current research that have been carried out (research on literary culture in Russia appears to be declining in the West) and partly because of the significance that was afforded them by both the Soviet and post-Soviet authorities.

This introductory chapter will explore theory relating to literature, its production and its consumption. It will review the previous work that has been carried out on a number of aspects of Soviet and Russian literature and seek to identify how this thesis will contribute to the field of study. Finally, the methodological approaches used in carrying out this research will be explained.

THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF LITERATURE

Before attempting to determine whether the function of literature has changed between 1996 and 2008, an understanding of the relationships between a number of factors that influence literature, its production and its consumption needs to be reached. Furthermore, in undertaking an exploration of how the disintegration of the USSR affected the role of literature, it is necessary to examine how the Soviet leadership's treatment of cultural artefacts affected literature and the ways in which it was both produced and consumed.

Prior to any examination of the production and consumption of literature, a definition of literature, both generally, and in the context of this thesis needs to be established. For Terry Eagleton, defining literature is akin to the challenge of identifying the 'single distinguishing feature that all games have in common' (1983, p.9), a sentiment echoed by Jim Meyer, who declares that 'at times one seems to be reduced to saying "I know [literature] when I see it," or perhaps, "anything is literature if you want to read it that way' (1997, p.1). At every level, defining literature is problematic, not least because 'qualities often thought to be literary turn out to be crucial to non-literary discourses and practices as well' (Culler 1997, p.18). In the first instance Eagleton suggests "'imaginative" writing in the sense of fiction' (1983, p.1) as an initial definition, but he immediately discounts this possibility, recognising that while Shakespeare, Webster, Marvell and Milton are likely to be examples of literature, so are the 'essays of Francis Bacon [and] the sermons of John Donne' (1983, p.1). The distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction' was further blurred in the late 1500s and early 1600s: news reports were not considered to be entirely factual and novels were not necessarily fictional (Eagleton 1983, pp.1-2). Furthermore, the definition fails to take into account texts that may once have been read as fact, but are now considered fiction, and texts such as the Bible, which is viewed as fact by some and fiction by others (1983, p.2). Clearly, the definition of literature as fiction is not appropriate. In an attempt to address this, Eagleton suggests taking the Formalist approach and examining the language of a text to identify its literary quality.² In his investigation, Eagleton struggles with the Formalist notion that literature 'transforms and intensifies ordinary language' (1983, p.2) and

² Formalism in Russia was at its most prominent between the 1910s and 1930s and sought to make the text itself the focus of analysis, by demonstrating how the text was indebted to forms and other works that had preceded it.

that a literary work could be analysed as a series of devices and techniques, not as an expression of the author's thoughts (1983, p.3). Eagleton finds that he cannot wholly accept the idea that literature represents an 'organised violence committed on ordinary speech' (Jakobson cited in Eagleton 1983, p.2) because he believes that 'there is no kind of writing which cannot, given sufficient ingenuity, be read as estranging' (1983, p.6), including, it would seem, a London Underground sign stating 'Dogs must be carried on the escalator' (1983, p.6). He elaborates further, exploring how the sign could be read as '*poetry*', before suggesting that the words could be prised loose from 'their immediate context and generalize[d] beyond their pragmatic purpose' (1983, p.6). This question of context adds another dimension to the debate. Jonathan Culler argues that 'when language is removed from other contexts, detached from other purposes, it can be interpreted as literature' (1997, p.25). But, he says, if 'literature is language decontextualized' causing readers to 'attend to potential complexities and look for implicit meanings' then 'to describe "literature" would be to analyse a set of assumptions and interpretive operations readers may bring to bear on such texts' (1997, p.25), thus appearing to leave 'the definition of literature up to how somebody decides to *read*, not the nature of what is written' (Eagleton 1983, p.7). Yet, once again, this definition is not adequate because of the 'value-judgements' that are imposed upon it. Although Eagleton suggests that literature may mean 'any kind of writing which for some reason or another somebody values highly' (1983, p.8), such a text is only likely to be read by a wider audience if it is valued by more than one person and the group to which they belong holds significant influence over others. For many, the fact that a text has been published, reviewed and reprinted gives them the assurance that it is worth reading (Culler 1997, pp.26-27). The question of value judgement is fundamental in its relationship with the formation of a 'literary canon', i.e. the body of works which form the 'unquestioned "great tradition" of the "national literature"' (Eagleton 1983, p.10). Recent decades have seen sustained debate in Western nations about the texts that form the canon and the extent to which it is still (or ever was) representative of the populations of these countries.³ One of the key points of contention is the question of inclusion and exclusion and, furthermore, who is qualified to make these assessments. E. Dean Kolbas is not alone in highlighting

³ See Guillory *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), Golding *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (1995) and Kolbas *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (2001) (among others) for the intricacies of these various debates about canon formation and the extent to which it is representative of the people who read it.

that the 'vast majority of critics and commentators imagine that a canon's formation, alteration, reproduction, and preservation depend primarily on institutions of formal education' (2001, p.46) and that they believe that 'the preservation or reproduction of art and literature would end without the explicit sanction of schools and universities' (2001, p.57). His view is shared, to some extent by Alan Golding, who believes that 'teacher critics shape canons through their criticism, reviewing, and teaching' (1995, p.41). However, Golding also explores the 'aesthetic or poet-based model', which holds that 'poetic canons are mainly the creation of poets themselves' (1995, p.41) and he advocates a synthesis of the two models for understanding which texts are selected for inclusion in the literary canon. The Western canon of literature is often accused of have being created by 'dead, white European males' and that the texts therein are representative of this population. Recent calls have been for a canon which includes women and people of colour. Furthermore, questions about which authors are included as 'writers of literature' have not necessarily revolved around what an author has written. Wrangling over canon formation has varied by country and its history is far more detailed and complex than can be explored in depth here. However, it is key to point out that some decisions about what is included in the canon are far more arbitrary or manipulated than they initially appear. Kolbas references Jane Tompkins's work on Nathaniel Hawthorne, which argues that 'the manufacture and maintenance of Hawthorne's reputation, which discloses his connections with prominent New England publishers, politicians, and reviewers, both contemporary and over successive generations' may be one of the reasons that he was originally, and still continues to be, part of the canon (2001, p.38) – nothing to do with the content of his texts. Golding highlights the case of Walt Whitman, who the New Critics sought to expunge from the canon of American literature because 'Whitman's nationalism [...] ran counter to the particular history of English poetry *that they wanted to construct* [...]' (1995, p.93). Even things as apparently arbitrary as whether or not a particular author is in print and available for lecturers to use in their courses can have an impact on the canon of literature. In making and reproducing value judgements on the quality of a text, the literary canon, particularly as it is taught in schools and universities, is pertinent to any understanding of why certain works are referred to as literature. However, the imposition of meaning, through this process of formal education, does not necessarily correspond to the meaning drawn out by the individual reader, thus failing to take into consideration the reader's role in creating meaning for a work of literature. The notion that the reader has some role to play in defining a text's meaning stands in opposition to the Formalist notion that all

meaning can be found within the text itself. Yet, as Elizabeth Freund points out 'the view that a text cannot live in isolation from a context of reading and response has acquired the force of cliché mainly because the text's natural companion, the reader, slips so easily into the category of that which goes without saying' (1987, pp.2-3). Thus any consideration of literature should seek to remember the reader's role in reaching a definition. The way in which literature is taught in schools or universities is also not necessarily replicated when the reader chooses other sorts of reading material. In practice, the literature that is taught in schools and universities is not the same as the sorts of texts that a reader might choose for himself or herself as 'entertainment'. Eagleton points out that works such as comics or *Mills and Boon* novels are not widely considered to be literature (1983, p.2). Yet there are those who are calling for educational establishments to re-evaluate their dismissal of these sorts of 'non-literary' texts and include some examples of them on their programmes of study. (As Lovell points out, such calls are now being heard in Russia, and are, to some extent, being heeded (2005, p.7.)

The problem of ascertaining whether the reader reads a text as the author (or indeed any other authority) intended is one that Meyer grapples with in his attempt to define literature. He advocates using a 'prototype' approach, whereby the focus is not on a list of criteria which *must* be met, but to which other examples 'bear some resemblance' (1997, p.2). He suggests that prototypical literary works:

are written texts; are marked by careful use of language, including features such as creative metaphors, well-turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration, meter; are in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction, or drama); are read aesthetically; are intended by the author to be read aesthetically; and contain many weak implicatures (are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation) (1997, p.4).

Clearly, the points in this list are similar to those outlined by Eagleton and Meyer recognises the challenges that they face (1997, pp.4-9). In summary, Meyer's suggestion that texts are 'marked by careful use of language' is reminiscent of the problem that the Formalists encountered; that to evaluate literature as an 'arbitrary assemblage of devices' means that the content is ignored. His assertion that literary works are 'written' and that they are 'poetry, prose fiction, or drama' fails to take in the complexity of whether texts have always been viewed as such, and the final three points on his list relate to the questions about how a text is being read and by whom in what context. In promoting such an approach, Meyer is careful to point out that just because a work does not meet all of the criteria he sets out it does not

prevent it from being 'literature' (1997, p.3), immediately demonstrating that his list is not perfect and open to interpretation.

Finding an adequate definition of literature is further complicated in the Russian context by the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods and the value judgements that were applied to literature during these times. (The way in which literature in Russia has been affected by attempts to find and impose definitions on it is discussed at greater length later in this 'Introduction' p.21.) Eagleton recognises that literature can often serve a 'highly practical function' (1983, p.8). He quotes religion as a possible practical function for literature, yet education, as demonstrated in both pre- and post-Revolutionary Russia, was also one of the roles that literature could play. As Culler points out 'literature has been seen as a special kind of writing which [...] could civilize not just the lower classes but also the aristocrats and the middle classes' (1997, p.37). In the Soviet period, literature was used as a means to educate readers in the 'appropriate' fashion. Eagleton's notion that 'all literary works [...] are rewritten' (1983, p.11) as a means of reinforcing the 'power-structure and power-relations' (1983, p.13) of a society certainly seem true in the Soviet context, where this was a conscious practice. However, this use of 'literature as an ideological instrument' was also countered by dissident literature, which can be viewed as 'the place where ideology is exposed, revealed as something that can be questioned' (Culler 1997, p.38). The question of canonicity is also complicated by the Soviet era. Golding points out that those admitted to the 'canonical house' may be 'continually shuffled from room to room', but, he asserts, 'we rarely exclude a poet once he or she has been included for any length of time' (1995, p.8). Such a statement seems to have been borne out in very many canons of the Western world, yet it does not address what happens to canons in countries which are under authoritarian control, or what happens after this control is removed. Golding says

'once in, a poet tends to stay in, if only in a small corner of the attic.

Getting in is another matter – a matter of meeting the historically specific standards that each literary generation has so easily thought "universal" [...] the standards exercised powerfully by each generation's anthologists' (1995, p.8).

Yet, in both the Soviet and the post-Soviet contexts, the canon has been dramatically reassessed, and in some instances, those who have been 'in' were suddenly 'out', and *vice versa*. In the Soviet period a large number of previously acceptable and accessible texts were examined according to the new regulations on literature, and either approved for continued reading, adapted to make them

appropriate, or removed from the public's grasp. Unsurprisingly, the same sort of process took place after the Soviet Union collapsed. The discussion and assessment of texts written in the Soviet period led, in the early 1990s, to calls by some for the wholesale banishment of any texts written in the Soviet period from the post-Soviet literary canon (Hodgson 2011). Such an approach is not surprising given that there are those who subscribe to the belief that works belonging to a 'canon' cannot be written as the authorities direct, but must come from some 'higher' place.

These are the challenges that any thesis concerning literature must seek to evaluate in finding an adequate definition of literature and in doing so, this thesis draws on the arguments presented on the previous pages. Thus, literature is defined as any work of fiction (in the twenty-first-century sense) in prose, poetry or drama form. This thesis does not explore works only in terms of their linguistic function, but explores their content, examines what the author might have meant and how the reader may have read it, all of which are of course biased by my own situation as a twenty-first century, post-Soviet, non-Russian reader.

Having established some form of definition of literature, the ways in which it is produced, circulated and consumed must also be explored as they too are particularly relevant to this thesis. The isolation of a text from the social conditions at the moment of its production, circulation and consumption troubles Pierre Bourdieu (Johnson 1993, p.11), whose assessment of the Formalist approach reaches similar conclusions to that of Eagleton:

'Refusing to consider anything other than the system of works, i.e. the "network of relationships between texts", or "intertextuality", and the – very abstractly defined – relationships between this network and the other systems functioning in the "system-of-systems" which constitutes the society [...], these theoreticians of cultural semiology or culturology are forced to seek in the literary system itself the principle of its dynamics' (Bourdieu 1993, p.33).

Bourdieu further exemplifies his rejection of internal analysis in his discussion of Foucault's 'field of strategic possibilities' (1993, p.33). While Foucault recognises that 'no cultural product exists by itself' (Bourdieu 1993, p.32), he refuses to relate texts 'in any way to their social conditions of production' (Bourdieu 1993, p.33). Instead, Foucault chooses to assimilate these social conditions within the 'field of strategic possibilities', thereby negating any external impact that there may be on

cultural production, and thus making cultural order 'a sort of autonomous, transcendent sphere, capable of developing in accordance with its own laws' (Bourdieu 1993, p.33).

However, a rejection of internal analysis as a means of defining literature does not automatically assume an acceptance of external methods. As Randal Johnson points out, Bourdieu

'takes issue with analysts who attempt, through quantitative or qualitative methods, to relate works directly to the social origin of their authors, or who seek an explanation in the groups which have commissioned works or for whom works are intended' (1993, p.12),

rightly declaring that such theories 'neglect the relative autonomy of the literary field' (1993, p.13). While Bourdieu recognises that social and economic factors do have an effect on culture as a whole, he asserts that the impact that these factors have is not direct, but refracted, and that any impact that external factors have on literature is distorted according to the logic of the 'field of cultural production' at that time (Johnson 1993, p.14). For Bourdieu,

'the full explanation of artistic works is to be found neither in the text itself, nor in some sort of determinant social structure. Rather it is found in the history and structure of the field itself, with its multiple components, and in the relationship between that field and the field of power' (Johnson 1993, p.9).

Thus Bourdieu is left with little alternative but to generate his own theory, which he terms the 'field of cultural production' (1993, p.27). Bourdieu's theory recognises that all works are affected not only by the positions, and possible positions, of other works; but also by the producers of these texts and their positions, and possible positions, in the field; and by the positions, and possible positions, of those who 'create' or legitimise both the works and the producers of the works. Furthermore, none of these positions is fixed, and even when the position remains identical 'the meaning of a work changes automatically with each change in the field' (Bourdieu 1993, p.30), i.e. the appearance of a new work cannot help but have some implication for existing works, producers and 'creators', and for the positions that they occupy. The personal trajectories of individuals in the 'field of cultural production' cause additional tension: not only are producers constantly striving to reach a different position in the field, they are endeavouring to defend the position that they already hold. Finally, the location of the 'field of cultural production' within the 'field of power' compounds the complicated relationships between works,

producers and 'creators'. Bourdieu declares the 'field of cultural production' a *field of struggles* (1993, p.30), in which three competing principles of legitimacy are identifiable as a result of the struggle for authority within the 'field of cultural production' (Bourdieu 1993, p.50). First, there is the 'specific principle of legitimacy' – the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers. Second, there is the 'principle of legitimacy corresponding to "bourgeois" taste' – those who occupy the dominant positions economically or politically, and who seek to conserve the established order. Third, there is the 'principle of legitimacy which its advocates call "popular"' – the choices made by the mass consumer (Bourdieu 1993, p.51).

The 'field of cultural production' is essentially divided into two opposing groups: the field of restricted production, and the field of large-scale production, with those in the first group seeking to produce works solely for other producers (the autonomous principle), while those in the second group striving for economic success (the heteronomous principle). Those located within the sub-field of restricted production are interested only in 'prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity' (Johnson 1993, p.15), and the symbolic power that peer recognition brings. The emphasis that the sub-field of large-scale production places on economic profit is shunned by those writing for other writers (the specific principle of legitimacy). The struggle between these two sub-fields lies in the autonomy of the field from external demands, and in the amount of symbolic power that producers hold. Those who are interested in economic profit are less resistant to external demands and tend to have less symbolic power, while finding that they are more easily influenced by the struggles of those in the dominant positions in the 'field of power' who are striving to 'conserve the established order' (Bourdieu 1993, p.41).

The desire to influence the hierarchy within the 'field of cultural production' manifests itself in a further struggle for the authority to impose the definition of the writer and the literary work, and to limit the number of people, or groups of people, who are entitled to contribute to any discussion on such definitions, as outlined in Bourdieu's second principle of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1993, p.42). Bourdieu dislikes the way in which culture reproduces social structures and therefore allows unequal power relations to be embedded and accepted as legitimate in the words used to discuss and describe everyday life (Johnson 1993, p.2). Quite rightly, Bourdieu is not alone in his concerns about the dubious legitimisation of power and the influence it maintains over those who are not part of the dominant group.

In spite of any desire to reject value judgements that pertain to culture and literature, to ignore ideas of 'high' and 'low' culture and the attitudes that are held in relation to such definitions would be to ignore a substantial part of the debate surrounding the definitions of literature, its production and its consumption. Arguably, any discussion concerning 'high', 'popular' and 'low' literature needs to begin from the broader definitions of these categories in relation to culture. In an attempt to define popular culture, it may be helpful to examine it in juxtaposition with 'high' culture. Debates surrounding the definitions of 'high' culture and popular culture are complicated. Yet it seems that there is greater consensus among critics regarding the definition of popular culture when it is placed in a context with 'high' culture. In line with Bourdieu's suggestion that the works that comprise the literary canon are decided upon by the dominant classes, Peter Burke advocates the identification of popular culture as 'unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the "subordinate classes"' (1978, p.xi). Richard Stites suggests that 'high' culture is 'lofty, elevated, exalted, and ethereal, [that] 'high' culture and the classics address the eternal truths' (1992, pp.1-2). In contrast, Chegodaeva proposes that popular culture is 'comforting' – books are 'light, easy to consume, unburdened with big ideas, and far away from the storms and passions of reality' and in contrast, 'real art [is] cathartic and cleansing' (cited in Stites 1992, p.180). Her suggestion is echoed by Boris Dubin (personal interview 2007) who suggests that 'culture should not weigh people down [...] they want to be able to read a book and then leave it behind on the metro'. Harriett Hawkins believes that the distinction between popular culture and canonised works is simple: fans of popular culture 'engage in their connoisseurship or scholarship voluntarily and not in school' (1990, p.109). Arguably, this is the clearest distinction between 'high' and popular culture – 'high' culture is anything deemed good quality and is taught at schools and universities. In contrast, popular culture does not reach the required standard to warrant such attention. Such an assessment reinforces concerns about the value judgements of one group of readers, who declare that one text constitutes acceptable reading matter, in contrast with another text, which does not. However, considerations of 'high', popular and 'low' culture are further complicated in the Russian context. As Kelly and Shepherd point out, it was not until the 1880s that the term 'culture' (*kultura*) became current in Russian society. They suggest that

'in the absence of *kul'tura* in the language of Russian society, the general meaning of the term was conveyed by the words "enlightenment" (*prosveshchenie*), "education", "civilisation",

“literature”, or “spirituality” (*dukhovnost*). For the characterization of individuals words such as “educated” (*obrazovannyi*), “well-bred” (*vospitannyi*), and the like were used in the same way as “cultured” (*kul'turnyi*) came to be used later (1998, p.7).

As the term *kultura* gained prominence in connection with the idea of educating the backward masses, it was understood as ‘a kind of value that could be accumulated, and then purposefully transferred to and acquired by wider groups of the population’ (Kelly and Shepherd 1998, p.8). This led to *kultura* and its related derivatives *kulturnyi* and *kulturnost* becoming integral to Soviet policy: ‘*kul'tura* was at the core of Soviet cultural policy, while *kul'turnost*’ was of a semi-official order and referred to the realm of everyday practice’ (Kelly and Shepherd 1998, p.9). Lovell elaborates further, suggesting that Lenin ‘did not have the patience to wait for the culture (*kul'tura*) of communism. He needed the quick fix of *kul'turnost*’, which defined ‘culture as a standard of civilized behaviour and a particular set of social skills rather than a set of deeply-held social or moral values’ (2000, pp.14-15). These attitudes meant that the cultural sphere was central in ‘shaping and facilitating economic development’ (Kelly and Shepherd 1998, p.9) and although it was determined as a ‘key site of change’ in the *perestroika* era (Kelly and Shepherd 1998, p.11), little difference could be observed in its function. The Soviet use of ‘culture’ (*kultura*) continues to reverberate in post-Soviet discussions about ‘high’, popular and ‘low’ culture (Kelly and Shepherd 1998, pp.12-13).

In contrast, the differing attitudes towards ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture stem from the original evaluation of popular culture in the West. Early discussions concerning culture tend to focus on its link to non-urban folklore tales. However, as Stites points out, Burke’s definition that popular culture is that of ‘peasants and artisans’ is not appropriate for today’s urban society (1992, p.1). Clive Bloom offers a more contemporary understanding of popular culture, arguing that by the turn of the twentieth century, the definition of ‘culture’ was more closely associated with ideas of good taste and that in the latter part of the century the word ‘popular’ when applied to culture implied an association with ‘market forces, mass reading habits and education, class divisions and attitudes at once political, social, cultural, and always aesthetic’ (1996, p.5). Stites proposes that patterns of popular taste reflect ‘among other things, attitudes to the city, the state, the nation, the family, money, foreigners, minorities, the arts, and the “system”’ (1992, p.2). However, ‘popular’ does not simply relate to questions of taste or attitude, and Burke uses Kroeber’s and Kluckhohn’s definition of popular culture which demonstrates that while it is ‘a

system of shared meanings, attitudes and values', it is also the 'symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which [these meanings, attitudes and values] are expressed or embodied' (1978, p.xi). For Bourdieu, the form of a text and its audience become significant when considering the two sub-fields within the 'field of cultural production', as they offer some indication as to the extent of 'popular' success. Unsurprisingly, poetry produced by a writer for his or her contemporaries is unlikely to achieve economic success or widespread recognition. In the opposite position is drama, which can provide significant profit and is enjoyed by those in the dominant social positions. Between these two positions is the novel, which can sometimes secure very big profits for a fairly large number of writers, from a wide-ranging audience that comprises not only other writers and those in the dominant social position, but also those in a dominated social position, i.e. the 'masses' (Bourdieu 1993, p.48).

Thus far, the discussion has focused primarily on the Western assessment of literature and culture. Essentially, the dilemma facing Russian writers from the 1830s onwards was to which of the two sub-fields within the 'field of cultural production' they should belong; that of restricted production and the aspiration to achieve fame only among other writers, or that of large-scale production where questions of popular recognition and monetary gain prevailed. As Stephen Lovell highlights, deliberations concerning the writer's mass appeal and whether he (or she) should bow to the pressures of market demand were already under way in the 1800s. Even Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837), the father of Russian literature, was preoccupied with questions which included whether the writer should take money for his work; what and where was the public; and whether the writer should aim to please his public (Lovell 2005, p.14).⁴ Pushkin achieved a popular success of sorts, most notably with *Evgenii Onegin* (1833), and from the 1830s the demands placed on the writer by the Russian reading public began to change. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, from Pushkin to Chekhov, there was something of a democratisation of literature, as writers sought to provide for readers from all classes (See Jeffrey Brooks *When Russia Learned to Read* (2003) in 'Review of Previous Literature', p.35 for further details of the nineteenth century

⁴ Pushkin was not alone in his deliberations relating to the popular appeal of authors. See Lovell, 'Literature and Entertainment in Russia: A Brief History' (2005, pp.14-15) for further details about the discussions surrounding the reading public and their tastes throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

democratisation of literature.) If the literature of the first third of the nineteenth century had been concerned with religious and folkloric subjects, then other themes, notably crime, science and romance gained popularity from the 1830s onwards (Lovell 2005, p.16). Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) and Maksim Gorky (1868-1936) all attempted to incorporate elements of the popular into their texts, causing consternation among the intelligentsia, who perceived works by these writers as belonging to the literary canon. However, as Eagleton points out, 'what matters may not be where you come from but how people treat you. If they decide that you are literature then it seems that you are, irrespective of what you thought you were' (1983, p.8). The attitude of the intelligentsia towards these writers and the works that they produced demonstrates the extent to which those in the 'field of power' hope to influence the works produced within the 'field of cultural production' with a view to maintaining the *status quo*. In this instance, the dominant classes hoped to perpetuate the idea that works written in Russia during the 1800s were of 'high' literary quality, and were produced by eminent writers, such as Pushkin (1799-1837), Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Turgenev (1818-1883) and Tolstoy (1828-1910) (Lovell 2005, p.11). Although this form of censorship on literature for the masses all but came to an end during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, it demonstrates the use of literature to force 'submission to the dominant ideology - individual submission [and] the submission of the very ideology of the dominated classes' (Balibar and Macherey 1981, p.85).

However, it is not the way in which the *Golden Age* of Russian literature does or does not conform to Bourdieu's theory of the 'field of cultural production' that provides the most interest. Bourdieu's theory has enjoyed relative popularity among Russian scholars as they seek to evaluate Russian literature's production and consumption. Bourdieu suggests that the 'field of cultural production' is 'relatively autonomous from the demands of politics and economics' (Johnson 1993, p.12), yet the attitude of the Soviet leadership towards culture, its production and consumption surely prompts the question, to what extent is the 'field of cultural production' independent from politics? There is little doubt that the Soviet regime sought to use culture as a means of reinforcing Soviet ideology, and the gradual replacement of the popular genres with officially-sanctioned works attempted to strengthen the Soviet message. The early part of the Soviet period was characterised by the Soviet leadership's belief that 'high' literature was being eroded by popular genres, and thus began the campaign against the 'decadent and "bourgeois" entertainment genres' (Lovell 2005, p.21). The Soviet leadership declared that there was to be no

distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, and that 'culture could - indeed must - be both "popular" (i.e. accessible, authentic, of the people) and "serious" (morally improving, intellectually challenging, and of high literary quality)' (Lovell 2005, p.34). This was the 'recipe' with which writers had to comply if they wished to see their works published. However, Soviet leaders recognised that literature could be used to educate the masses in the spirit of socialism, and to alienate the entire readership by producing works that no one wanted to read would be a mistake. Instead, to encourage people to continue reading, the 'Sovietisation' of popular literature took place. The Soviet leadership recognised that the 'flat language of bureaucrats will not do' to correspond with the population (Dunham 1976, p.28). Instead the 'appeal must be to the emotions, by emotional means' (Dunham 1976, p.28) and literature was in a position to do just that. The Soviet leaders understood that readers enjoyed popular genres, and the 1920s saw the 'Red Pinkerton' phenomenon emerge as the Soviet authorities demanded that popular literary genres were adapted to send a Soviet message. In essence, the 'realism' of Socialist Realism meant little more than getting the appropriate ideological message across in an accessible form and this 'accessible form' was a Sovietised version of popular literature. Vera Dunham highlights the way in which this fiction was 'turned into a sort of town hall, a platform from which the system justified itself' (1976, p.25).

Although one of the original aims of providing 'educational' and informative reading material for the masses in the 1920s allowed elements of popular literature to remain, it paved the way for Stalin's introduction of Socialist Realism in the 1930s. It became clear, that 'Soviet literature – with its newly enshrined aesthetic, Socialist Realism – left no room for the genre of popular literature as understood in Western Europe at the time, or as in 1900s Russia' (Lovell 2005, p.23). In contrast with Bourdieu's notion that literature was not necessarily representative of the group from which it came, the Soviet leadership strove to ensure that any text passed by the censors should provide the reader with a realistic portrayal of what the Soviet world would one day become. As Bourdieu goes on to discuss,

'by conceiving of literary works as [...] collective products of social groups, such [an approach] ignore[s] the objective conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods' (Johnson 1993, p.13).

Arguably, this is precisely what the Soviet leadership hoped to achieve: because they contained far more important messages about the construction and maintenance of Soviet life, books were not commodities to be produced, traded or

consumed in the manner of other household goods. Furthermore, the Soviet regime's attitude to cultural production inverted Bourdieu's belief that the 'field of cultural production' did not necessarily 'reward effort with success' (Johnson 1993, p.13). In the Soviet period, writers who adhered to the tenets of Socialist Realism and perpetuated the ideology of the Soviet regime were often rewarded and recognised for their contribution, at least by the state. In the manner of the poisoned chalice, those writers who were awarded a *USSR State Prize for Literature* were 'immediately discredited in the eyes of "serious" art' (Thomson [n.d]).

However, this thesis will argue that it is possible to see this Soviet-sanctioned 'field of cultural production' as a 'false' 'field of cultural production' because it responded directly to the external demands placed upon it. In contrast, the 'underground' system of literary production appears to have been a more genuine 'field of cultural production', which refracted, rather than directly reflected, the external political stance. Although the Soviet regime removed the sub-field of large-scale production in the sense in which Bourdieu describes it, the sub-field of restricted production remained, although with an altered remit. Authors within this sub-field clearly produced their 'subversive' works for one another, but there was also a substantial readership for these works among intellectuals and the significance of symbolic power should not be underestimated. Furthermore, Bourdieu suggests that those who are in possession of 'substantial economic and social capital' are the ones who are most inclined to take risks (1993, p.67). However, it may also be true that those who have nothing to lose will take substantially greater risks as they seek to challenge the dominant ideology, and arguably, to increase their symbolic capital in the eyes of other producers. In spite of the apparent continuation of the sub-field of restricted production, there is no question that any reading of Bourdieu in a Soviet context is repeatedly upset and challenged by the attempted control of cultural production. After all, how can the sub-field of restricted production continue to exist if its opposite, the sub-field of large-scale production, does not? Equally, if the dominant discourse and the popular demand are regulated through a system of fear, any challenge is likely to have serious consequences for those involved, thereby diminishing the level of struggle for dominance.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the dominant discourse concerning literature, its production and consumption that emerged in the Soviet era continues to influence the ways in which literature is discussed in the post-Soviet period. As Bourdieu

asserts, any assessment of the 'field of cultural production' necessarily takes the historical dimension of the field into consideration (1993, p.60). Returning to a more 'normal' system, such as that which began to emerge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, is complex. Similarly, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been attempts to construct new terms in order to discuss the literature of the post-Soviet era. The notion of a literature made legitimate by the advocacy of a wide-ranging audience has touched upon many of the issues relating to cultural production that Bourdieu's theory sought to answer. The struggles within the 'field of cultural production' between those who write 'for the sake of writing' and those who are open to the idea of profit have been a key point of discussion concerning literature in the post-Soviet era. It has repeatedly been suggested that the (relatively) free market is responsible for the rise in popular literature, yet there is limited recognition that the struggle to balance commercial success and symbolic power is not linked solely to the demise of the Soviet Union. Many writers who enjoyed 'success' in the Soviet period, either officially or not, have struggled with the notion that economic survival in the post-1991 era has meant a compromise that they are not prepared to make: that is, a shift from the sub-field of restricted production, toward the sub-field of large-scale production.⁵ Those who have managed to reconcile commercial interests with artistic ones are consequently causing critics and academics significant consternation, particularly when the types of text that these 'reconciled' writers, such as Boris Akunin, seek to produce make reference to elements of culture that might traditionally be found in 'high' literature. (The 1990s debate concerning the inclusion of 'popular' elements in works that would traditionally be considered 'high' literature is reminiscent of similar discussions in the late 1800s and early 1900s about texts written by respected authors, such as Tolstoy or Chekhov (1860-1904).) Aiming such works at the 'masses' and ensuring that they have the skills to decode the references undermines the critics and the 'cultural capital' that they have: by allowing the masses to understand the dominant discourse, writers, such as Akunin, have allowed a wider circle of commentators to join the discussion on what defines a literary work.

⁵ See Shneidman, *Russian Literature 1995-2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium* (2004, p.11) in which he suggests that the 'so-called *sorokaletnie*, which include writers such as Anatoly Kim (1939-), Anatoly Kurchatkin (1944-) and [Andrei] Bitov (1937-), are [...] torn between old values and a new reality'.

In spite of this, the search for a new terminology which defines literature, its production and its consumption in post-Soviet Russia continues and is informed by the shift in power between the two sub-fields within the 'field of cultural production'. The notions of 'high' and 'low' literature remain, but the shift in dynamics between the sub-fields within the 'field of cultural production' demand new terminology. There is some reluctance to use the term 'popular', partly because the discourse around it is still tainted by the Soviet attitudes towards 'popular' literature: mass literature (*massovaya literatura*) was a negative phenomenon considered to be exclusive to the capitalist West on the assumption that it was for 'passive consuming, private reception' (Menzel 2000). Lovell (2000) points out that Soviet intellectuals were reluctant to apply terms such as 'mass', 'popular' and 'elite' to their own society, an apparent contradiction given that Socialist Realism had to be both 'popular' and 'elite' (Lovell 2005, p.34). Although the Soviet authorities rejected the connotations that the Western terms held when they were applied to culture, it has been hard to dissociate Soviet culture entirely from these terms and the definitions that accompanied them. One of the terms which has been adopted in the twenty-first century in order to discuss literature that is popular is *middl-literatura*. Of course, applying this term to literature immediately prompts the question whether this is simply the *russification* of another Western term: 'middle-brow'. Sergei Chuprinin (2004b and 2006) offers the definition of *middl-literatura* as

'a type of literature which is situated between 'high', elite literature and mass, entertainment literature, which is born of their dynamic interaction and essentially removes the eternal opposition between [high and low]'.

In his view *middl-literatura* is a 'lightened' version of 'high' literature; it does not make the same spiritual and intellectual demands as high literature, yet it differs from mass literature because it is of higher quality, and is not aimed solely at entertaining the public.

Of course, there are those who might suggest that any study of literature in the present day is somewhat outdated, and that there are other methods of cultural production that better reflect contemporary society. However, literature has long provided an insight into Soviet society. As Lovell asserts,

'when we study societies which are either historically remote - or, as in the case of the Soviet Union - relatively closed to more direct methods of investigation, the 'social life of things' [...] become immensely valuable sources' (1998, p.693).

Books and reading during the Soviet era were one of the few regime-endorsed ways for spending one's leisure time. As a result, the demand for books was high, and from the 1960s there was a series of book shortages, followed by various leadership attempts to combat the problem without 'commercialising' culture.⁶ This level of demand for specific texts gave the outsider a means of understanding life in the USSR. Since the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia has arguably become more open, literature is no longer viewed by the people in the same way. Although Lovell suggests that literature can be used to study societies that are 'historically remote', the way in which people evaluate contemporary literature can provide an insight into present-day society, and the number of people who read on a regular basis makes the evaluation of contemporary literature a legitimate method for understanding some aspects of modern society. The number of people in Russia who claim to read regularly, are eighty-two per cent of females and sixty-eight per cent of males aged between 25 and 49 (Mickiewicz 1999; Levina 2001, cited in Menzel 2005, p.45), and this reinforces the notion that literature continues to be a valuable source for providing an understanding of Russia today.

⁶ See Lovell, 'Publishing and the Book Trade in the Post-Stalin Era: A Case-Study of the Commodification of Culture' (1998, pp.679-698) for a detailed analysis of the ways in which the Soviet leadership attempted to solve the problems associated with books and their availability.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

The extensive nature of this study and the varied areas which will be addressed mean that not only would it be impossible to make broad generalisations regarding previous work on Russian literature, it would also be unwise to attempt such a task. Therefore, I have chosen to approach this review of previous literature according to the key chapters of my research: publishing and the book trade; the literary journal; politics and literature; and popular literature and the writer. The division of this literature review by chapter is further necessitated by the fact that there are very few books that cover all of the aspects of the Russian literary scene that this thesis will investigate; the majority of previous work on Russian literature concentrates on a single subject area. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that this review will examine previous literature in both English and Russian. This research aims not to favour sources in one language over sources in the other: both have their own strengths and weaknesses, and neither should be considered superior given that they offer two, sometimes very different, perspectives on the literary climate in Russia over the last two decades. It should also be recognised that the volume of previous literature varies according to the theme of the chapter. This is not to suggest that if there is a large volume of previous work on a particular subject that it has already been fully researched, and conversely, that if there is only limited writing on a subject that it is not worthy of investigation.

Although I have stated that this review of previous literature will be divided according to chapter, it would be imprudent to begin without first looking at those works that do not fit comfortably into any of the chapters outlined above. These texts defy categorisation primarily because they address the subject of Russian literature on a broader scale. Some have simply provided me with a context for my research, while others have helped to identify the key areas that my research will investigate. Yet it is important to mention that this study does not use any of these works merely as a 'template', but attempts to draw together the various aspects of the Russian literary scene that they explore.

Although covering a period earlier than this thesis is examining, Deming Brown's two books *Soviet Russian Literature Since Stalin* (1978) and *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature* (1993) provide useful background information on literature in the Soviet period. In the first of these texts, Brown begins by discussing the 'increasingly awkward' term 'Soviet literature' (1978, p.1), arguing that it had

become so because of the fragmentation and disorganisation that plagued the Soviet literary scene, not to mention the fact that, in spite of the term 'Soviet' literature, almost all of the texts written under this title were in Russian, and in not the languages of the peoples of Russia. Furthermore, he asks the pertinent question: can writers who are forced to publish abroad, either in exile or simply because they cannot get published in the USSR, still be considered representatives of Soviet literature? In answering his own question, he suggests that if those writers publishing abroad are not part of the Soviet literary scene, then what remains is 'a literature of pretense' (1978, p.1). Yet he perceives similar themes and patterns in the works of all Soviet era writers, whether published in the Soviet Union or not, something which he believes binds them together as part of the same discussion (1978, p.2). Brown's book provides a comprehensive understanding of the fluctuations in policy governing writers, demonstrating that there was some flexibility in what writers were able to produce in the Soviet period. Furthermore, it highlights the limits to which writers could push the boundaries before the Soviet leadership felt the need to reassert its control over the content of literature. His first chapter 'The Literary Situation' (1978, pp.1-22), charts the challenges that Soviet literature faced during the post-war period and the Khrushchev era. He discusses the stifling policies of the post-war Stalin period, suggesting that, 'while a few good novels and poems' did appear, 'for the most part a vast, dull, mass literature of make-believe was produced under the guise of socialist realism', but, he points out, there was 'a small, embattled minority of individuals who maintained a creative interest in good literature' (1978, p.3). Brown does not offer a further explanation of what this 'good literature' might have been, but as he spends the remainder of the chapter examining the extent to which the writer was able to question the Soviet system in his or her work, the assumption must be that 'good literature' equates to something that was not necessarily sanctioned by the Soviet leadership. Brown's subsequent discussion of how policy tightened and relaxed during Khrushchev's time in power is useful, particularly for the way in which it illuminates the divisions between writers of the liberal revisionists and the conservative dogmatists (1978, pp.5-6). His discussion of the Writers' Union and the considerable role that it had to play in managing writers and assuring that texts were suitable for publication (1978, pp.9-12) serves to illustrate that the post-Soviet split in the Writers' Union was perhaps unsurprising. Brown goes on to explore the position of poetry in Soviet Russia, examining the work of those who had been born in the period 1887-1906 who managed to outlive Stalin and continue to write poetry (1978, pp.23-61); the 'first generation of Soviet poets' born between 1907 and 1915 (1978, pp.62-79); the

poets who were formed during the war (1978, pp.80-105) and 'the younger generation of poets' (1978, pp.106-144). While interesting, particularly in its focus on individual poems and poets, it is not immediately relevant to this thesis. From poetry, Brown moves on to discuss fiction, concentrating on the decline of the novel and the subsequent 'rise of short fiction' (1978, pp.145-179). He suggests that one of the reasons for the novel's decline was because it was 'difficult and dangerous [...] for a democratically inclined writer to give his views the full exposure that a large novel requires' (1978, p.145). Furthermore, he notes that 'short prose forms tend to emerge in times of accelerated social or cultural change, when new attitudes toward human relations, morals, and social behaviour are breaking forth' (1978, p.146), an interesting observation because it is one that has been recently heard in post-Soviet Russia, where the short novel is once again becoming a favourite format for writers. In his chapter on short fiction and its growing popularity, Brown begins his discussion in the 1920s before tracing the development of short prose forms through the 1930s and into the 1960s, demonstrating its relevance throughout the Soviet period. He suggests that one of the most notable features of the Soviet short story in the 1960s was its 'increasingly wide range of topics' (1978, p.152). As with his chapters on poetry, Brown offers an assessment of short fiction written by a number of individual authors, which he extends into Chapter Seven, 'the youth movement in short fiction' (1978, pp.180-218). Of greater relevance to this thesis are Brown's chapters 'Literature re-examines the past' (1978, pp.253-284) and 'Literature copes with the present' (1978, pp.285-309). While these sections are clearly dealing with a period earlier than that covered by this thesis, the upheaval caused by Stalin's death and the reassessment that was permitted in the wake of it was not dissimilar from the experiences of those living in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's disintegration. In his conclusion, Brown suggests that 'a major feature of the writing of the post-Stalin period was its effort to settle accounts with the past, to correct the record' (1978, p.374), which once again provides an interesting parallel with the post-Soviet period when writers were confronted with the freedom to reassess the nation's past.

Brown's second book *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature* (1993) is a much slimmer volume focusing on prose written in the period 1975-1991 and he himself admits 'the quantity of writing published during this period is so large that a rigorous selection had to be made' (1993, p.ix). As in his previous book, Brown begins with a summary of the literary situation (1993, pp.1-18), in which he covers 'publication, genres [and] criticism'. However, his treatment of the literary scene in this

introductory chapter does not go into the level of detail that might be expected for such a significant period in Russia's literary history. In spite of this it does provide a picture of the challenges that writers and critics faced in the immediate post-Soviet period as they struggled to evaluate literature that was previously banned, writers who were newly rehabilitated and a political situation that was unknown to many of them. As before, Brown focuses on a number of individual writers to illustrate his points, which, while interesting, somewhat limits its usefulness in the context of this thesis. Brown's third chapter 'Retrospective writing about the Stalin period' (1993, pp.62-78) deals more comprehensively with some of the 'returned literature' and the themes that it covered. He begins by pointing out that 'in this climate, aesthetic refinement was less highly prized than information and analysis', that many felt that 'the times so urgently demanded a literature of factual disclosure that, for the moment, truth was more important than finesse or fantasy' (1993, p.63). (It would be interesting to know what impact this search for the truth had on writers – did they become accustomed to writing in this way and thus lose the ability to write for aesthetic purposes, prompting the complaints that have been heard about quality in more recent post-Soviet years?) Brown dedicates several pages to the 'war literature' that was written prior to the 1980s, but published during this period focusing, once again, on a select number of writers and discussing their individual texts. Brown is careful to point out that 'it would be incorrect to represent the war writing published in the 1980s as solely a literature of debunking and disparagement' (1993, p.69) as he notes that many of the writers he discusses maintain respect for the Soviet soldier and the complex moral dilemmas that they faced. This chapter also deals with village prose (discussed in greater detail in a subsequent chapter) and, perhaps more interestingly, the image of Stalin in literature, which deals with the 'confusion and psychological strain of life under Stalin (1993, p.76). Chapter Seven, "'Tough" and "cruel" prose' (1993, pp.147-170) discusses the emergence of 'alternative' prose, as termed in 1989 by the critic Sergei Chuprinin. Brown's discussion about the origins of this term provide useful background for this thesis, not least because the question of terminology is particularly pertinent on the Russian literary scene. One of the key points that Brown makes in relation to 'alternative' prose is that it demonstrates a 'lack of ideological tendency', which he suggests comes from 'a desperate consciousness of the absence of something to believe in' (1993, p.148). Arguably, this trend is still seen in some literature produced well into the post-Soviet period and the critical assessment is the same – writers are suffering from a lack of something to believe in. Just as Shneidman is in his first book *Russian Literature 1988-1994: The End of*

an Era (1995), Brown is positive about the future of Russian writing in the early 1990s, suggesting that, in spite of the market forces which were governing editorial and publication decisions, a number of new writers were beginning to emerge (1993, p.171). Thus his final chapter is concerned with the future of Russian literature and seven new writers who 'display a genuine diversity of interests and modes' (1993, p.172). Brown also points out that it is 'impossible to foresee which ones of them will make enduring contributions and which will fade into obscurity', a perceptive comment given the that the substantial changes to book production and the esteem in which writers were held changed considerably in the 1990s. Brown's conclusion to his second book appears somewhat brief considering the changes that had taken place in the period on which he focuses. However, such a brief conclusion may be considered prudent in the face of the dramatic changes that were likely to unfold soon after this text was published.

In his book, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (2000) Stephen Lovell examines how the sociology of print culture applies to the specific Soviet and post-Soviet condition. Lovell's book provides much valuable background information on the development of reading in Russia prior to 1924 and why the Soviet regime encouraged people to read. In his 'Introduction' (2000, pp.1-24), Lovell examines the issues of class and culture, and discusses whether the labels 'high', 'popular' and 'mass' can be applied to Russia. His comments on the reading habits of Russians give an understanding of how readers were able to access books. Lovell notes that

'one of the best sources we have on Soviet reading habits in the late 1980s is research on private book collecting, and in particular on the relationship between books people owned and those they borrowed from public libraries' (2000, p.89).

He explains that by this time, many libraries in Russia were severely under-funded and the most frequent patrons were the least influential in society – pensioners and students; the better-educated members of society had begun to abandon the libraries in the 1960s. Part of the reason for this decline in library use coincided with the growth in private book collections as readers realised that 'if they wanted to read a book, they would, as likely as not, have to buy it (or at least borrow or steal it from a friend)' (2000, p.90). Lovell reports the figures of those claiming to have a private collection of books – eighty-one per cent in 1988, with sixty per cent of those collections comprising more than one hundred books (2000, p.90). Lovell also details the types of texts that made up these private collections, the majority of texts

falling in the 'imaginative literature' category. His comments on the years of stagnation under Brezhnev indicate that the reader was still keen to add to his or her collection and would buy what was available rather than lamenting the shortage of certain types of text, for example, self-help manuals and self-education literature in general. The pace of change, when it finally came, in the late 1980s was something that the average reader struggled to keep up with. Readers had to contend not only with 'what was read, but also when it was read' and the volume of literature published and revelations connected with it left many readers struggling both to make sense of all the material and to understand why they should even care (2000, p.92).

Lovell also provides helpful information about *samizdat*, which he defines as

'books, periodicals and other written material produced independently of the state and all other authorities, that develop ideas and artistic trends which are not adequately reflected in the existing press or which diverge from ideological and social norms' (2000, p.111),

a definition that he has adapted from A. Suetnov's article in *Samizdat* (1992). He continues in his explanation of *samizdat*, arguing that the times in Russian history when there has not been some form of self-publishing are few and far between, mainly owing to the 'confrontational relationship' between state and society' (2000, p.111). The trend for self-publishing began in the late 1950s and intensified significantly after the show trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel in 1966, in which these two writers were convicted of having published anti-Soviet materials in foreign editorials. Lovell continues to trace the development of *samizdat* through the 1970s and 1980s, explaining that advancements in technology allowed *samizdat* to be produced and circulated in greater quantities, leading to its 'much more stable, even 'systemic' existence in Soviet society' (2000, p.112). However, as Lovell points out, it was not just individual writers whose texts were produced in *samizdat* form, whole journals began to appear, and even changed hands for money, which represented an alteration to the informal networks in which *samizdat* had originally circulated. By the end of the 1970s, *samizdat* and *tamizdat* (the process of smuggling a work abroad where it could be printed and then returned to the USSR) 'functioned as a crucial means for the dissemination of culture and information' (Lovell 2000, p.112). As Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* continued, by the end of the 1980s many of the works previously circulated in *samizdat* form were published officially. Lovell points out that this change in the political environment encouraged 'traditional *samizdat* journals [to become] even more fearless and ambitious in their

operations' and prompted new 'unofficial' publications to start (2000, p.112-113). The successes of these journals are discussed at greater length before Lovell explains the reason for their eventual decline:

‘*samizdat* cannot really gain ideological respectability and large print-runs and hope to remain *samizdat*. [...] It] could no longer be distinguished by its ideological or its material independence of the state, as such independence was now the norm for Soviet periodicals’ (2000, p.113).

However, it is not until his final chapter, ‘Reading in Post-Soviet Russia’ (2000, pp.128-155) that Lovell addresses the situation in Russia between 1991 and 1996. He argues that ‘crisis’ is an inaccurate assessment of print culture in the post-Soviet era, and suggests that it is an over-simplification of the events that have occurred in the publishing industry since 1991 to reduce them to a single word (2000, p.128). Lovell chooses to break his final chapter into two sections: ‘Post-Soviet publishing and bookselling’ (2000, pp.128-141) and ‘Reading of periodicals, 1992-6’ (2000, pp.141-154), before offering his ‘conclusions’ (2000, pp.154-155). In the first section, Lovell helpfully identifies the new positions that printers, publishers and sellers found themselves in after 1991, when they no longer had to work with the state to achieve their aims (2000, p.129). In addition, he notes the very important role of the ‘Special Federal Programme for Book-Publishing in Russia in 1993-95’ and comments on the fundamental aims of the programme in supporting both publishers and book sellers (2000, pp.129-131). Lovell concludes his observations on post-Soviet publishing and bookselling with an assessment of the types of texts and the ‘new’, post-Soviet reader whom publishers hoped to please. Much of the second section of Lovell’s final chapter is devoted to the experiences of *Ogonek* between 1992 and 1996, but he does offer some commentary on newspapers (2000, pp.150-154), describing the difficulties that many of them encountered as their audiences changed and diversified (2000, p.151). Lovell once again suggests that the fears of some commentators about the future of the press were not fully realised, as many newspapers and periodicals managed to survive (2000, p.151). In the conclusion to his final chapter, Lovell asserts that any suggestion that the Russian market was becoming ‘normalised’ failed to take into account the position from which Russian readers were coming. The fact that readers had been accustomed to thinking about culture in a certain way could not be forgotten overnight, and no doubt affected any understanding of a new way of looking at literature. He concludes with the suggestion that the destination of Russia

after the period of transition in the early 1990s remained unclear for some time (2000, p.155).

Jeffrey Brooks' book, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (2003), provides a comprehensive background to the development of reading culture in Russia. In order to explore the position of literature in Russia today, it is important to understand its progress, particularly from the time when literacy levels began to increase and literature became available to a wider audience. Brooks' first chapter outlines the various reasons why 'ordinary' people in nineteenth-century Russia learned to read, and he describes their growing understanding that being literate provided them with the opportunity to move up the social ladder and improve their prospects (2003, pp.3-34). Although his book concentrates on an era earlier than the period on which this thesis will focus, there are distinct parallels between the production and consumption of literature in the 1800s and in the 1990s. Brooks notes that the growing numbers of readers had an impact on the types of texts that were produced. Even in the 1800s, questions about what people should be reading began to emerge: 'educated Russians who thought about the issue of popular literacy were unanimous in the view that the question of what kind of literature reached the common people was of utmost importance' (2003, p.60). Brooks observes that 'the question of what the common people should read, and to what extent their own preferences should be respected, re-emerged after the October Revolution' (2003, p.60), and his remarks illustrate that discussions and struggles over the role of literature are not new in Russia, and did not appear simply with the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. Furthermore, his third chapter 'The Literature of the Lubok' (2003, pp.59-108) charts the development of early popular literature in Russia and explores the types of stories that were popular among readers from the lower classes. Brooks notes that the writers of the *lubki* (popular stories for the masses) found that they were looked down upon by writers who produced *belles lettres* and by those who produced 'sanctioned' texts for the lower classes (2003, p.80). In addition, he notes that the publishing industry thrived as the *lubki* became more and more widely read (2003, pp.92-100), but that the industry faced a significant challenge when it came to distributing the pamphlets that it produced (2003, pp.101-108). The various aspects of popular literature and the themes that it addressed are noted in Brooks' subsequent chapters. He explores the role of periodicals and the serialisation of stories from week to week (2003, pp.109-165) and makes some comment on Anastasia Verbitskaya (1861-1928), arguably the first writer of the 'women's novel' (2003, pp.153-160). Critical reception

of her work was not dissimilar in its nature to that with which Oksana Robski's texts have been received. In his concluding chapter (2003, pp.295-352) Brooks explains the position of literature and how it was viewed in Russia immediately prior to the 1917 Revolution, illustrating the path of development that popular literature was following and demonstrating how the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks affected such literature. It offers a detailed description of the era to which some of today's critics and journalists are looking back in their search for a Russian literary tradition.

In his two books, *Russian Literature 1988-1994: The End of an Era* (1995) and *Russian Literature 1995-2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium* (2004), N. N. Shneidman examines several aspects of the Russian literary scene. Shneidman is a firm believer that 'literature and politics were intrinsically intertwined in the former Soviet Union' (1995, p.6). As a result, he devotes a significant proportion of his book *Russian Literature 1988-1994* to an exploration of the impact of politics on literature and literary production as well as examining the changes on the Russian literary scene before and after the 1991 collapse. Shneidman explores how the fragmentation of the Writers' Union represented the numerous different views that writers and intellectuals held about the fate of the Soviet Union and the direction in which they believed the country should move (1995, pp.6-12). Furthermore, Shneidman charts the challenges that the Soviet Writers' Union faced during *perestroika* and the early 1990s. He argues that the reasons for this fragmentation and the squabbles over property are not related to the production and quality of literature. Instead they are the result of 'average writers' seeking to protect the advantages that they enjoyed during the Soviet era and he goes as far as to suggest that 'serious literary discussion among writers is a thing of the past' (1995, pp.12-18). Shneidman also dedicates a significant section of his first chapter to the 'thick' literary journals and explores their experiences of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policy. He details the change in governance and direction that some of the most well-known journals took, and he notes the names of several new journals, including *Soglasie* (*Accord*), *Moskovskii vestnik* (*The Moscow Herald*) and *Solo* (*Solo*), that emerged in the immediate post-Soviet period (1995, pp.23-29). The final section in Shneidman's first chapter is devoted to book publishing and culture (1995, pp.29-34) and describes the challenges that publishers faced in the production and dissemination of books in the early part of the 1990s. Shneidman concludes that 'sheer ingenuity, as well as public and government support, is essential for the successful transformation of Russian literature from a tool of indoctrination into a vehicle of democratic cultural enlightenment, tolerance, and

education' (1995, p.34). The 'Russian Literary Scene' is the focus of Shneidman's second chapter (1995, pp.35-57), which further explores life for Russia's writers before and after the collapse of the USSR. For many, it seems that this change is represented by the ideological divisions that have emerged in the absence of a firm leadership line on the direction in which literature should move. Shneidman considers how the demise of the Soviet Union affected the language which appeared in prose, arguing that slang, sex and swearing were becoming more prolific. In addition, he acknowledges that women writers started to come to the fore. Chapters Three, Four and Five are dedicated to the evaluation of various individual writers' works and their contribution to Russian literature. Interestingly, in the 'Conclusion' (1995, pp.203-206) to his first work, Shneidman remarks that 'the Russian people are a reading nation, and the appearance in the last few years of a number of young and promising authors bodes well for the future of Russian literature' (1995, p.206).

In contrast to *Russian Literature 1988-1994* (1995), Shneidman's second book, *Russian Literature 1995-2002* (2004), does not offer such a comprehensive investigation and discussion of the Russian literary scene of the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead, he places a greater focus on individual writers and their works, using them to serve as examples for the categories into which Shneidman believes Russian literature to be divided. However, he does offer some insights into the major changes that he sees in the 1995-2002 period. In his first chapter, Shneidman provides a useful consideration of the ways in which Russia has or has not changed since Putin took power. He asserts that Putin's presidency was initially marked by his inability to install any kind of economic stability, owing to the fact that a large number of Yeltsin's former supporters continued to be closely involved in running the country. As a result, Shneidman suggests that Putin was instead forced to accumulate political power and influence over the information sphere (2004, p.4). Having set the political and economic scene, Shneidman explores the changes that have taken place on the stage of Russian literature. He observes that many writers in post-Soviet Russia have struggled to survive, not only in a practical sense, but also in terms of their 'ideological, political, and social attitudes to the new Russian state as well' (2004, p.5). He notes that the ideological position of writers is split into two streams: the liberals and the conservative 'patriots', each of which has its own readership, and which sees representatives of each group 'criticise and attack each other on ideological and political grounds' (2004, p.6). Shneidman's assertion that 'most Western Slavists and literary scholars

ignore the literature of Russia's "patriotic" writers' (2004, p.6). While there may be some truth in this, there are those who do acknowledge the existence of both 'camps' and their different literature, even if they do not engage in elaborate discussions on the subject. Although this thesis does not explore in great detail the different camps of literature, it is interesting to note Shneidman's assessment of the situation. The divisions among Russia's writers are reflected in the split of the former Soviet Writers' Union along liberal and conservative lines. Unfortunately, these unions are no longer concerned about literature, but with 'reinstating writers' former privileges' now that producing literature in post-Soviet Russia 'is equal to slave labour' (2004, p.7). Furthermore, the conflict within the writers' unions has been reflected in the various journals, although Shneidman limits his comments to the conservative Slavophiles, who he accuses of displaying 'extreme chauvinistic, nationalistic, even fascist views' (2004, p.9). Shneidman's discussion of 'The Literary Scene' (2004, pp.10-19) is again useful context for this thesis, as it allows several points of comparison with the later 2000s and covers much ground in relatively few pages. He argues that 'much of the literature currently on the market is hastily produced and superficial, especially the works of authors lacking a vivid imagination and members of the younger generation with inadequate life experience' (2004, p.10). Yet this assertion appears contrary to the demands of publishers who want established authors and tried and tested formulas. He continues, saying that many writers who produced interesting texts in the Soviet period have not either not produced anything of note or are simply 'resting on their laurels' in the post-Soviet period (2004, p.11). Although he notes several authors who have emerged in the post-1991 period and who have 'widened the thematic and artistic range of contemporary Russian literature', he suggests that 'a lack of training and professional guidance' has adversely affected 'the language and style of many of them' (2004, p.12). Faint praise is also awarded to women writers, whose emergence on the literary scene is relatively recent. However, Shneidman says somewhat condescendingly that, in some cases, 'their prose is still weak, but they demonstrate narrative skill and there is hope for the future' (2004, p.17). Criticism is met with the same condemnation as literature: 'hastily produced, subjective, superficial, and couched in generalities' (2004, p.18) and he censures the 'older generation' of critics for their lack of book reviews. However, the number of reviews and their diversity as discussed later in this thesis appears to refute Shneidman's claims that these critics are not interested in reviewing books. The subsequent pages of Shneidman's first chapter deal with 'The Literary Prizes' (2004, pp.19-23), which constitutes useful background information for this thesis,

but is not directly relevant. Furthermore, the rapid pace of change on the literary prize scene makes it difficult to remain entirely up-to-date. In his section on 'Publishing and the Reading Public' (2004, pp.23-26) his words about the publishing industry and book trade are limited, suggesting that the big publishers are in control of what the public wants to read, thanks to their advertising campaigns and promotional activities (2004, pp.15-16). He argues that 'changes in the social composition of society [...] have greatly affected [...] the book publishing industry' (2004, p.24), suggesting that many 'serious' readers, such as the intelligentsia, could no longer afford to buy the highbrow books that publishers produced. Although he offers some figures for the literary journals and mentions the predicament in which they find themselves owing to the discontinuation of funding from Soros, the extensive consideration of the 'thick' literary journals that comprised a significant section of his previous book has not been repeated in this text, once again suggesting that their role in the discussion of literature had begun to wane (2004, pp.25-26). Advancements in technology mean that he is forced to include a section on the internet (2004, pp.26-28) and its contribution to the Russian literary scene. (The decision to use Kononenko's vignettes demonstrates the role that the internet plays in the dissemination of literature, and Shneidman is right to include it in his text.) In some ways, Shneidman's negative statement that 'the 1990s was, perhaps, the first decade in Russian literary history that did not produce either a single great new writer or a work of prose that could be placed among the recognized classics' (2004, p.12) seems borne out by the points he makes in the course of his first chapter, yet the author of this thesis struggles to see the contemporary literary scene in such downbeat terms. Much of the rest of Shneidman's book is given over to the discussion of individual writer's works and careers in the post-Soviet period. However, he returns in his 'Conclusion' to discuss the future development of Russian literature, which he suggests will depend 'to a large extent, on the general economic, political, and social situation' in the country (2004, p.184) and he concludes on a more positive note than in his earlier chapter, arguing that 'the Russian literary scene remains vibrant, and there is hope for the future. [...] among the multitude of new writers who publish in print and on the Internet, a new, natural genius may appear' (2004, p.184).

Andrew Wachtel's 2006 text, *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*, explores how the position of the writer has changed not only in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but in other Central and Eastern European countries where socialist regimes dissolved in the late 1980s and

early 1990s. Although Chapter One, 'The Writer as National Hero' (2006, pp.12-43), provides a useful context for his book, explaining how the writer in Central and Eastern Europe came to be viewed as a national hero and why the words of writers came to be held in such great esteem by those living in Socialist countries, Wachtel makes a number of bold assertions that could be perceived as overstatements of the role of the writer in the creation of East European countries. He argues that 'the vast majority of East European countries were, in substantial measure, invented by writers. Literature [...], far from being a reflection of reality, was very frequently a creator of new identities and new social and political realities' (2006, p.12). He suggests that the 'national "awakenings"' (2006, p.13) often began with 'cultural and linguistic movements rather than political ones' and that 'in the absence of political unity, writers were necessary to pull a nation together, to make fellow citizens aware of their nationhood by creating conditions for community' (2006, p.14). Arguably, the most significant point that Wachtel makes in his first chapter is that socialist rule was responsible only for deepening and augmenting the prestige that national authors enjoyed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (2006, p.26). Furthermore, he suggests that the policies that the Central and Eastern European regimes introduced in support of writers endowed them with both 'high status and high incomes relative to the rest of the population' (2006, p.26). Perhaps the more startling assertion is that this was true not only for those who became 'official writers', but also for some of those who chose not to adhere to the party line in all the work that they produced (2006, p.26). Wachtel explains that the policies designed to support writers were on offer not only to those who had 'sold out' to the communist regimes' demands. He suggests that, with the exception of the most notorious dissidents, even the majority of non-official writers 'were able to live and work as writers with the help of the state' (2006, p.34). As it was entirely possible to obtain a 'no-work' job for a journal, research institute, or university, many dissident writers had sufficient time to write unsanctioned texts (2006, p.34). Wachtel makes the somewhat contentious point that, in doing so, this made dissident writers something of a 'hired conscience' for the state (2006, p.34). One final point of particular interest in Wachtel's first chapter is his idea that the Socialist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe allowed writers to operate in that manner because they provided works that a certain percentage of the population wanted to read, not least because the state-approved works did not meet their requirements (2006, p.35). He suggests that the blind eye that was turned to the majority of *samizdat* publications was because of the 'safety valve' that it provided to the regime in preventing intellectuals feeling that there was nothing for them from a cultural perspective

(2006, p.42). (However, such an assertion seems a little inadequate, and it is not until the conclusion that Wachtel makes a more accurate point about why writers felt the need to write texts that were contrary to the regime's stipulations: '[dissident writers] tended to produce in opposition to the state rather than in response to literary demand' (2006, p.217)).

Wachtel's second chapter, '1989-2000: The End of the Golden Age' (2006, pp.44-72), discusses the decline in the prestige of the writer in the post-Berlin Wall era and it explores how writers have succeeded, or not, in adapting to their new status since 1989. As Wachtel points out, the demise of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe meant that 'writers were no longer needed' (2006, p.45). Much of the second chapter is devoted to the experiences of writers living and working in countries other than Russia, and although this provides some interesting points of comparison, it is not directly relevant to the content of this thesis. However, Wachtel does make some mention of the situation in relation to literary prizes in Russia, highlighting the proliferation of such awards since 1991 (2006, p.65). In addition, he notes the dilemma that publishers face when deciding whether to publish works that they know may be of high literary value, but of limited interest to the wider population (2006, p.69).

Wachtel's subsequent chapters examine a number of strategies that writers have followed in the post-socialist era in the attempts to remain relevant to post-socialist readers. Each of these chapters explores a different strategy that writers across Central and Eastern Europe have adopted in order to maintain a high-profile position in society. Of the several approaches that Wachtel discusses, the eighth chapter, 'Learning to Love Popular Literature' (2006, pp.189-214), is the most relevant to this thesis. Once again, he explores the experiences of a number of Central and Eastern European writers, but among them are two of Russia's bestselling authors: Aleksandra Marinina (1957-) and Boris Akunin (1956-). Wachtel explores Marinina's rising popularity and discusses some of the reactions to her detective novels, suggesting that the responses that her texts provoke are not always 'literary' (2006, p.197). He concludes his thoughts on Marinina by stating that her works can be viewed as 'a Russian translation of popular Western genres (albeit based on a hybrid of various Western crime novelists and with some specifically Russian touches)' (2006, p.197). In addition to his comments on Marinina, Wachtel also explores the success enjoyed by Boris Akunin, arguing that Akunin 'manages to straddle the line between popular and serious literature' and

that Akunin has enjoyed almost universally excellent reviews (2006, p.202). Wachtel uses this section of his fourth chapter to outline the reasons for Akunin's success, due in no small part to the mystery that surrounded his identity when *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-) series was first published. However, Wachtel fails to mention the criticism that Akunin has endured in response to the *Fandorin* series, which seems to have come, primarily, from well-respected literary critics. In his 'Conclusion' (2006, pp.215-219), Wachtel suggests that while the experiences of Central and East European writers in the first decade of the post-socialist era may have been comparable, he argues that as the former Socialist countries start to move in different directions, with some joining the European Union, or NATO, the lives of the writers living in those countries will become increasingly dissimilar (2006, p.219).

Rosalind Marsh's text *Literature, History, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991-2006* (2007) seeks to understand the processes that Russian writers have been through since the collapse of the USSR in the search for a post-Soviet identity 'at the individual, group, regional, ethnic and national levels' (2007, p.10). The majority of Marsh's book focuses on the historical fiction that has emerged since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, yet she devotes a significant section of part one to the political and cultural context of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. In her second chapter, 'The post-Soviet literary scene' (2007, pp.73-102), Marsh explores the ways in which the 'formerly monolithic structure of Soviet literature [...] splintered into a variety of "literary sub-cultures"' (2007, p.73). She begins with Mikhail Zolotonosov's assessment of the different literary sub-cultures that he identified in 1991 and discusses in greater detail the 'alternative and post-modern' texts in the post-Soviet context (2007, pp.83-95). However, it is Marsh's analysis of the 'debates on elite literature, mass literature and "middle literature"' (2007, pp.95-101) that are of most relevance to this thesis. This section of her second chapter charts how the attitudes towards popular literature have changed since 1991 and the emergence of the new genre 'middle literature', which has been used to describe 'good' popular literature that has been awarded literary prizes. Marsh argues that the notion that mass literature plays a useful psychological and social role by 'providing entertainment and an escape from a harsh reality, or by affording insights into contemporary society, offering reassurance and helping people to adapt to the turbulent and changing times' (2007, p.97) is starting to be recognised by Russian critics. Of course, as Marsh rightly points out, there is still a strong critical opposition to mass literature, with critics branding it 'a waste of time and money [...] eminently

forgettable' and not reflective of the 'genuine tastes of the population' (2007, p.98). Furthermore, Marsh discusses the relative merits of Chuprinin's notion of 'middle literature' and questions whether his list of the writers of 'middle literature' is accurate, suggesting that some of those names would perhaps consider themselves writers of 'serious literature' instead (2007, p.100). Marsh concludes her second chapter by arguing that 'contemporary Russian culture is characterised by continuing conflict between the generations' (2007, p.102), just as it is in many other countries, and that while some critics assert that the 'cultural pluralism' is not a normal result of artistic freedom, but in fact a 'reflection of the general chaos and disintegration of moral and political values in contemporary Russian society' (2007, p.102), Marsh is generally more positive, preferring to see the diversity as a result of a 'free culture' (2007, p.102). Marsh does go some way to updating the situation in the early part of the 2000s. Her section on 'the literary journals' (pp.52-57) documents how the journals have managed to survive the 1990s and the schemes that each journal has tried in order to continue publication in the 2000s. The competition that the 'traditional' journals now face since the emergence of specialist publications, as well as the changing expectations of the Moscow- and St. Petersburg-based reading public, put further pressure on the editors of the literary periodicals.

As discussed at the beginning of this literature review, the scope of this thesis makes it necessary to evaluate previous works on Russian literature according to the key chapters of my research and will thus start with texts relating to the Russian publishing industry. Gregory Walker's text *Soviet book publishing policy* (1978) provides a comprehensive background to the way in which the publishing industry operated during the Soviet era, with a focus on the practical workings of the industry, rather than on the 'restrictive control mechanisms' (1978, p.1) that have concerned the authors of other texts purporting to discuss the Soviet book trade. Walker's second chapter offers details of the nature of the book as a 'special kind of commodity' and explains how the status of the book in a socialist society varied from its status under capitalism (1978, p.7). He highlights the way in which the ideological content rather than questions of supply and demand determined a book's value and the number of copies that were to be produced and suggests that one of the key reasons that the publishing industry was able to operate under such constraints was due to the large subsidies that were handed out by the state. In addition, Walker questions the methods used for evaluating the publishing industry's output, arguing that measuring the total number of titles issued and the total volume

of output in sheet copies to be an unreliable indication of the quality of a book's content (1978, p.13). An understanding of the way in which the Soviet system of quantifying publishing output and the value placed on certain texts is invaluable when attempting to evaluate the post-Soviet book trade, particularly as many of the old traditions continue to have an impact in the 2000s. Walker's subsequent chapters address the role of the Communist Party's involvement in the publishing industry before moving on to consider the structures that operated in the world of Soviet publishing, from the government apparatus and its associated methods of regulating the industry, through to the publishing houses and their relationship with the powers that controlled them. In addition, Walker details the complicated connection between the author and the state, and he explores the difficulties of operating a system where each stage of the process, from paper allocation through to printing and distribution, is so closely intertwined. His final chapter on 'special kinds of publication' (1978, pp.102-119) highlights the special attention that certain sorts of publication received, and makes for interesting reading, particularly when viewed in a post-Soviet context. Yet, in much the same way that Walker (1978) complains that Boris Gorokhoff's text *Publishing in the USSR* (1959) had become outdated by the mid-1970s, so too is it true that Walker's book has suffered the same ageing process, yet an English language text that focuses solely on updating the situation of post-Soviet publishing seems not to have appeared.

Karl Mehnert provides additional information about reading and publishing in the Soviet era in his volume, *The Russians and their Favorite Books* (1983). He briefly comments on the peculiarities of a publishing industry driven by the allocation of paper and targets to be met, rather than those of supply and demand (1983, p.xii) and explains that, in this instance, the most widely read books do not necessarily reflect what readers actually want to read. Mehnert suggests that when a society is as closed as that of the USSR, then one of the most profitable means for discovering what the ordinary person is really like is through the books that they read (1978, p.xii) – arguably such an assessment remains true irrespective of the society in which they live. The remainder of Mehnert's text is devoted to establishing which authors readers in the Soviet Union wanted to read and exploring the content of these texts.

Birgit Menzel briefly touches upon the changes to publishing in her contribution to *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective* (2005). In her chapter, 'Writing, Reading and Selling

Literature 1986-2004' (2005, pp.39-56), Menzel identifies four main changes that have taken place in the 'basic conditions of culture' (2005, p.39), the most relevant of which to the publishing industry are 'the dissolution of all the state institutions that had ruled literary life since 1917' and the 'commercialisation of culture since 1991' (2005, p.39). Menzel describes the impact that the last years, and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union had on publishing, explaining that the introduction of new laws on the freedom of the press, which permitted the founding of private companies, coupled with the decline of state financial support, dramatically altered the face of publishing in the new, market-led economy. Menzel provides statistical information allowing comparisons to be drawn between publishing in the mid-1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. However, her data are incomplete and cover only the period until 2002. The problems of distribution that have been encountered by publishers in the post-Soviet era are documented by Menzel, who discusses some of the approaches that have been employed in order to ease the difficulties associated with the circulation of books throughout the vast Russian territory (2005, p.50). In addition, she comments on the various ways in which writers are trying to guarantee their long-term success by writing series rather than single, stand-alone novels (2005, pp.51-52). However, Menzel's discussion of both the distribution of texts and the attempts that authors are making in order to achieve sustained appeal to readers comprises just a small section of her chapter, and leaves much scope for further development in this thesis. In addition to her consideration of the publishing industry, Menzel briefly considers the function of the literary journal and recognises its significance in linking the vast peripheral regions of Russia to the two metropolitan capitals of culture (2005, pp.40-41) before examining the dramatic rise and fall of the literary journals' circulation figures in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Jeremy Dwyer discusses the Soviet and post-Soviet methods of publishing literature in his article 'The *Knizhnoe obozrenie* Bestseller Lists, Russian Reading Habits, and the Development of Russian Literary Culture, 1994–98' (2007). Although his article focuses on the bestseller lists compiled by *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, which he uses to explore how Russian reading habits and wider literary culture evolved during the first post-Soviet decade, Dwyer discusses the deregulation of the tightly controlled state publishing machine, and suggests that as a consequence of this loosening of state control, publishers started to pursue profits, which in turn necessitated some consideration for the texts that readers wanted to read. In addition, Dwyer touches upon some of the key difficulties that publishers faced in the immediate post-Soviet

period, yet he argues that 'by the turn of the century the Russian publishing industry in general appeared to have recovered and adjusted to the free market' (2007, pp.297-298), which appears something of an over-simplification because it fails to take into account the state's role in supporting the post-Soviet publishing industry. In collating his data, Dwyer flags up several mistakes that have been made by previous studies into readership tastes, arguing convincingly that the print run and the number of titles published does not necessarily reflect the relative popularity of books and genres among readers (2007, p.301). Accordingly, the chapter in this thesis that examines the publishing industry and its output is careful to avoid drawing conclusions about reader taste on the basis of the statistics presented. In his analysis of the bestseller lists, Dwyer recognises the significance of the Soviet past in shaping post-Soviet readership trends and he acknowledges the impact that the Soviet period has had on the publishing industry since 1991. As a result, the publishing chapter traces key issues associated with publishing in the Soviet period, before exploring how post-Soviet development of the publishing industry has led to changes in the function of literature.

Discussion of the state of the Russian publishing industry has been more prolific in Russia. The *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* (The Russian Book Chamber) has compiled a database of all the texts published in pre-revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, which can be searched by a variety of criteria, including author, title, year, or publisher. Unfortunately, the database is somewhat temperamental and can bring back an error message instead of the desired result. In addition, the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* has compiled a series of brief reports (comprising mostly graphs and figures rather than analysis). The *Assotsiatsiya knigorasprostranitelei nezavisimyykh gosudarstv* (ASKR; The Association of Book Distributors of Independent States) makes use of the data collected by the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* and produces annual reports on the state of the Russian publishing industry. Lensky (2004), Sirozhenko (2005, 2006 and 2007), and Kirillova and Sukhorukov (2008) have each produced annual summary reports for the ASKR's *Vestnik* (*Herald*) publication, which detail the changes in publishing output and the possible reasons for these shifts in the publishing industry. These reports have been invaluable for understanding the breakdown of the materials published in a given year and have been used in this thesis to build up a picture of the way in which publishing has changed in the 2000s.

In her text, *Sovremennoe literaturno-khudozhestvennoe knigoizdanie Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Konspekt lektsii* (2000, *Contemporary Literary-Fiction Book Publishing of the Russian Federation: A Synopsis of Lectures*), Svetlana Karaichentseva discusses book publishing in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, detailing the general characteristics of the industry, and the main groups of publishers producing works of fiction. The first chapter of her text explores the differences between central publishing houses and the regional and local publishers, knowledge of which is imperative when attempting to illustrate any changes in the publishing industry in the post-Soviet era. The second chapter of Karaichentseva's text summarises the publishing industry in the 1990s, making a distinction between state and private publishing houses, and in each case providing a brief description of the publishing house and the materials produced. Her final chapter examines the major trends of development in the publication of fiction texts in the 1990s, and provides detailed statistics of the total print run and number of titles produced between 1991 and 1998, as well as a breakdown of the figures according to the nature of the publisher i.e. state-owned or private, the type of text and by region. Karaichentseva offers limited analysis of the information that she presents, highlighting only that the development of private publishing houses in the 1990s was in its infancy, but that changes were occurring rapidly.

Andrei Ilitsky (2003) provides a breakdown of what he considers the key periods in Soviet (from the 1980s) and post-Soviet publishing. In *Knigoizdanie sovremennoi Rossii* (*Book Publishing of Contemporary Russia*), Ilitsky addresses the changes that the publishing industry has undergone throughout the 1990s, until 2002. Starting with 'The Conception of New Russian Publishing' in 1991-1994, Ilitsky then discusses the crises of 1994-95 and 1998, and moves on to the challenges, such as overproduction, that he claims have emerged in the twenty-first century. In addition, Ilitsky suggests there are three main periods through which Russian publishing has passed: the post-Soviet period (1991-1994), the era of the series (1995-1998), and 'the era of the mainstream', or 'the era of the brand' (1998-2002), which, at the time of writing, publishers were still enjoying. He concludes that one of the fundamental obstacles that many publishers have yet to overcome is that of the problem with distribution and that in spite of numerous changes in the ownership of publishing houses and the materials that are produced, it is only the lucky few that find themselves in a relatively safe position. Although both Karaichentseva and Ilitsky provide detailed discussions of the position of Russian publishing in the 1990s, neither is able to supply the most recent publishing statistics.

Although not an academic study, the most comprehensive work covering the post-Soviet publishing industry is Boris Kuznetsov's *Ekonomika i organizatsiya izdatelskoi deyatel'nosti* (2006, *The Economics and Organisation of the Publishing Business*), which is designed as a course textbook for those who are studying the publishing industry and book editing at higher education establishments. His first chapter 'The organisational structure of publishing' (2006, pp.15-40) provides a detailed description of the many manifestations of state control over publishing and the way in which the system worked. Chapter Nine, 'The transfer of books into the retail market' (2006, pp.207-212), explains the methods used in distributing books once they are published. Arguably, the relatively short length of this chapter in comparison to some of the others in Kuznetsov's book illustrates how little there is to say on the matter of distribution, simply because the infrastructure continues to be absent. Chapter Twelve, 'Book production' (2006, pp.259-282), explains how the publishing industry operates from an internal point of view. In addition to discussions surrounding the Russian publishing industry, Kuznetsov provides details of the publishing industries in a variety of other countries, notably the United States, China and the UK, which allows the reader to understand the wider context and enables him or her to evaluate the relative successes and failures of Russia's publishing industry as it has emerged from the Soviet past (2006, pp.286-300).

Just as there is relatively little written about the post-Soviet publishing industry since 1996, so too is there limited information about the literary journals. Riitta H. Pittman's article 'Perestroika and Soviet Cultural Politics: The Case of the Major Literary Journals' (1990) provides a comprehensive analysis of the changes that took place towards the end of the 1980s which occurred as a consequence of Gorbachev's decision to appoint various journal editors to positions within the government. Pittman explores the impact the appointment of Sergei Zalygin had on the circulation of *Novyi mir* and she argues that the changes he made to the journal's editorial board in combination with the alterations to publishing policy were responsible for the huge increase in *Novyi mir*'s readership figures. Pittman cites Zalygin when she suggests that part of the reason for the literary periodicals' rise from specialist publication to 'must-read' journal, was because of the way in which the journals were quick to supply the Russian public with information about the political and social changes that were taking place at the time (1990, p.120).

Individual journals have also been the focus of various studies. *Ogonek* (*Flame*) is the subject of Stephen Lovell's case study in *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (2000), and although he focuses on a later period than Cosgrove (2004), Lovell's study only extends as far as 1996. In order to illustrate the difficulties which the periodical press faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lovell's sixth chapter offers the reader a case study of the periodical *Ogonek* between 1992 and 1996, in which he outlines the combined problems of rising paper prices, increased competition and declining reader interest. Simon Cosgrove examines the development of *Nash sovremennik* (*Our contemporary*) in his book *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-1991* (2004). The material published in *Novyi mir* in 1988 is analysed by Ellen Chances in her chapter 'The Thick Journal *Novyi mir* at the Peak of Glasnost-Era Euphoria' (2005), which, while interesting does little to update the current situation surrounding the literary periodicals.

In the twenty-first century, the debate surrounding the literary journals and their role on the Russian literary scene appears to have fallen into two camps. In Russia, the anxieties relating to the preservation of the journals have not vanished, and print media, radio and television have devoted numerous column inches and airtime to the editors of journals, who continue to promote their journals and the texts that are published on their pages. Some of the 'big names', including Andrei Vasilevsky and Anna Safronova who are associated with the publication of Russia's literary journals, discuss the fate of such periodical publications on the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*: 'Sudba tolstykh zhurnalov: izdavat ili zakryvat?' ('The fate of the "thick" journals: to publish or to close?'), mentioning in particular the fate of the journal *21st-Century Volga*, the closure of which seemed not to attract any attention among Western scholars. The general interest of the journals to the wider public is reinforced by the coverage of the eightieth anniversary of *Novyi mir*'s first publication. The anniversary was noted in several articles, such as 'Intervyu s glavnym redaktorom *Novogo mira*' (2005 'Interview with the editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir*'), and also on the radio, with *Radio svoboda* inviting listeners to phone in and offer their comments on *Novyi mir* (2005). Once again, there is no evidence to suggest that Western scholars observed the anniversary of one of Russia's most famous literary journals.

With a few exceptions, Western academics appear to have abandoned the literary journals to their fate. In *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*

(ed. Neil Cornwell, 2001) Alla Latynina's and Martin Dewhirst's chapter, 'Post-Soviet Russian Literature' (2001, pp.234-251) makes some mention of the literary periodicals' position in the 1990s and suggests that the 'critical state' (2001, p.235) that the literary journals were in served to illustrate the difficulties that the commercial market imposed on literature. Latynina and Dewhirst exemplify the decline of the literary journals through the inclusion of *Novyi mir's* plummeting circulation figures between 1990 and 2000, and they suggest that one of the factors that contributed to the decline of the literary periodicals was the decision by many writers no longer to publish new works first in journals and then in book form. In addition, their chapter discusses some of the many articles that appeared in the 'thick' journals concerning the fate of Russian literature and examines some of the significant texts that the individual journals published.

The impact that politics in Russia has had on literature is not a new topic for discussion, yet remarkably little has been written about the relationship between the two in the post-Soviet era. Although the end of the Soviet regime should have signalled the end of political influence on culture, it seems that covert political interference remains, particularly in relation to journalism and factual works. In fiction, the presence of politics is flaunted, and used as a marketing tool. In 'Na fone Putina' (2005 'Against Putin's background') Maksim Krongauz observes that there is a increasing trend for Vladimir Putin to appear in recent fiction, either as himself, or loosely disguised as another character. Krongauz attempts to identify the reasons why Putin has become a popular hero for modern-day fairy tales; he asks why the president should be of such interest, and why is it this president in particular so fascinates the reading public. In order to find answers to these questions, Krongauz reviews the content of works by four authors before concluding that the Putin created in these works is a picture of the man that the author would like him to be, not as he necessarily is. Krongauz is not the only Russian to write on the phenomenon of Putin's appearance in contemporary literature. His article is a response to an article by Yevgenia Lavut on the same subject. In her article 'Slovo o presidente' (2005 'A word about the President'), Lavut explains that she has discovered the key to any publication's success - refer to Putin and the work will sell. In her article, she investigates the print runs and reviews several books that all claim to give the reader an insight into the workings of the Kremlin and into the mind of their president.

Frank Miller's book *Folklore for Stalin* (1990) examines the literary trend that portrayed Stalin as the saviour of the Soviet people. In his book, Miller explores the value that the Soviet authorities placed on folklore and its associated traditions, and he examines the ways in which the leadership manipulated folklore performers and their 'texts' for political reasons. In Chapter One, 'The Origins of Folklore for Stalin' (1990, pp.3-25), Miller asserts that all Russians were familiar with their own folklore and had become adept at recognising the allusions to well-known folkloric passages in a multitude of films, plays and texts (1990, p.3). Although this work clearly concentrates on works published in the Soviet era and about Stalin, it provides an important source against which Putin's appearances in contemporary fairy tales can be evaluated.

In 'Putin's Quest for an Ideal Public Image' (2002), Greg Simons discusses the extent to which Putin's public image in the late 1990s and early 2000s was manipulated and he attempts to identify exactly what sort of image the Kremlin's PR experts were hoping to achieve. Simons' list of bullet-points describes various efforts by Yeltsin's successor to ingratiate himself with voters and provides a useful measure against which events in fictional texts can be evaluated: certainly the image of the 'ordinary man' is one that appears in many of the texts which cite Putin as their hero. Simons also recognises that the image of Putin, once created, required maintenance in order for it to continue its valuable mission in making the president appear as the man whom voters could trust. He identifies the two occasions when Putin's image could have been tarnished, the *Kursk* tragedy (the sinking of a Russian nuclear submarine caused by the explosion of faulty torpedoes fired as part of a naval exercise. One hundred and eighteen sailors and officers were killed.) and the Moscow apartment block bombing, both of which occurred in 2000, but suggests that these events did not cause any lasting damage to Putin's presidency. In his final paragraph, Simons asserts that 'the illusions of the PR-generated idealised public image of Putin are being reinforced through the use of literature. [...] The appearance of book literature may be an attempt to add greater credence to Putin's ascribed personal qualities by using a more respected and traditional means of conveying the message' (2002), which certainly seems to have been the case throughout the 2000s, although it is debatable whether such depictions have always been positive.

Putin's appearances in contemporary fiction are explored by Andrei Rogatchevski in his article 'Putin in Russian Fiction' (2008). Rogatchevski clearly accepts that there

has been a trend to gain deeper insights into Putin's life by portraying him in fiction, and his article discusses the works of fifteen authors, including Bykov, Kononenko and Olbik, who seek to achieve this in their texts. However, in discussing the works of so many authors it is impossible for Rogatchevski to explore any one of these texts in great depth, and his article cannot help but leave the reader wanting to know more. Rogatchevski's article does not propose any startling new ideas – he suggests that Olbik's novel *Prezident (The President, 2002)* achieved popularity because the hero had all the traits that Russian voters like to see in their 'chosen one' (2008, p.632), and he is in firm agreement with Lavut when he quotes Grigoreva: 'the word "Putin" in a book title guarantees more or less decent sales' (2008, p.634). In spite of this, Rogatchevski's evaluations of not only the texts but also the real-life events that provide a context for the fictional action offer the reader the opportunity to better understand the motivation for writing a Putin-based text.

In his pamphlet, *Putin and the Press: The Revival of Soviet-style Propaganda* (2005) Oleg Panfilov, the Director of the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations, charts Putin's rise to power and highlights the numerous occasions during the presidential campaign when Putin sought to 'maintain and protect freedom of speech in Russia' (2005, p.5), which contrasts starkly with his actions after becoming president. Panfilov illustrates the ways in which Putin's attitude towards the freedom of the press changed after 2000, and suggests that while the 'Doctrine of Information Security' may not have been mandatory, it was clear that Putin expected the media to follow the directions laid down within its ninety pages (2005, p.9). Furthermore, staff employed by the State Television Company 'admitted that during the events in Beslan (the school siege in September 2004), they received "from above" a list of words not to be used or mentioned on air' (2005, p.21), including, it would seem, Putin's name (2005, p.20). While Panfilov's text makes only limited reference to the texts which emerged in the early part of Putin's presidency, he appears convinced that 'Putin's era has revived something that was almost forgotten during the nine years of liberalism under Yeltsin: the old Russian tradition of adoration of officials and the presidential establishment, reverence to a Bureaucrat, who has the power to give or take, to punish or reward, with a new position or privileges' (2005, p.1), and his pamphlet is a useful reminder of Putin's actions to control press freedom.

The question of press and authorial freedom is addressed by Evgenii Bershtein and Jesse Hadden in their article 'The Sorokin Affair Five Years Later On Cultural Policy

in *Today's Russia*' (2007), in which they discuss the events surrounding *Idushchie vmeste*'s attack on Vladimir Sorokin's novel *Goluboe salo* (1999, *Blue Lard*) and his appointment by the Bolshoi Theatre to work with composer Leonid Desyatnikov on a new opera *Rosenthal's Children*. Bershtein and Hadden's article not only provides a useful chronology of the events as they unfolded, it reports Sorokin's response to the affair and offers a convincing counter-argument to his analysis. Arguably, Sorokin was something of an 'easy target' given the content of his texts, which are not for those with a more delicate constitution: 'Sorokin's deliberate accumulation of graphic sexual, scatological and profane motifs marked him out as one who would challenge any orthodoxy' (Gillespie 2006). His subsequent novel, *Den oprichnika* (2006, *Day of the Oprichnik*), is 'a satirical attack on Putin's Russia', in which 'the "hero" spends his day raping, torturing, murdering, extorting bribes, and acting as government censor' (Kalder, 2011). Sorokin believes that motivation for the attack on his work was an experiment: the authorities wanted to test whether the public was receptive toward censorship of literature, and they received a resoundingly negative response. Bershtein and Hadden are unconvinced by Sorokin's assessment of events and highlight several points where his evaluation fails, suggesting that there is no encroachment by politicians into freedom of speech for authors. First, they argue that the Administration of the President made only limited comment on the affair and that any comment that was made was invariably in support of Sorokin and freedom of speech. Second, the protests, though annoying could hardly be termed 'scary' and were not comparable to the burning of books by the Nazis as some newspapers had reported. Finally, the decision to prosecute was more about showing 'administrative zeal and generat[ing] media coverage' than about protecting the morality of Russia from Sorokin's 'pornographic' novel. Although Bershtein and Hadden's assessment of the Sorokin affair appears convincing, their examination of the events five years later does not make any reference to how political attitudes towards the press and literature have changed in the interim and it does not revisit Sorokin's suggestion that this was a test by politicians which they may have subsequently refined and re-tested.

The study of popular literature in Russia is a relatively recent phenomenon. Stephen Lovell and Birgit Menzel's edited collection of articles in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective* (2005) addresses the explosion of popular literary genres since 1991. While each of the articles included in their text are interesting, they are not all relevant to this thesis. Therefore this literature review will cover only those articles that are strictly

relevant to the focus of this study. The changing fortunes of the writer in the post-Soviet era and of popular literature are detailed in Stephen Lovell's first chapter 'Literature and Entertainment in Russia: A Brief History' (2005, pp.11-28), in which he offers an analysis of the path of popular literature in Russia from the mid-1800s. He argues that while the intelligentsia preferred to promote the idea that only 'serious' literature was written and enjoyed in Russia, the reality was quite different, and for many writers the question of commercial success had to be considered. Lovell outlines the work of Faddei Bulgarin who devoted a significant proportion of his career to establishing 'what and where is the public?' (2005, p.14), and identified four main groups into which the reading public could be divided (2005, p.15).⁷ As Lovell points out, the significance of the 'middle estate', identified by Bulgarin as 'educated but non-elite urbanites' (2005, p.15), should not be underestimated. Not only did they comprise the group that was entertained by Bulgarin's bestseller *Ivan Vyzhigin* (1829), the demands of this group of 'moderately educated, socially aspirational, curious but non-intellectual types' (2005, p.20) were essentially responsible for the development of 'middlebrow' fiction that emerged by the 1900s. Lovell's chapter also details the impact that the Bolshevik seizure of power had on the continued development of Russian forms of popular literature, arguing that while the path that popular literature was on may have been disrupted by the Soviet regime's ideas about culture, it was not wholly interrupted. Lovell argues that, certainly in the early decades of Soviet rule, some elements of popular literature remained and that Socialist Realism itself was a form of popular literature (2005, p.22). Furthermore, Lovell observes that, in the early part of the Soviet period, many readers did not have serious objections to the socialist realist formulas, in part because their taste in literature was still relatively underdeveloped. However, the continued use of the socialist realist recipe throughout the Soviet period meant that as readers became more sophisticated, the familiar formula did little to stimulate interest (2005, p.25). Lovell's chapter finishes with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the abundance of Western translations that appeared on the Russian book market. However, he astutely observes that while Russian readers may have enjoyed such texts, they did so only for a short period of time, before they started searching for a Russian equivalent that addressed the challenges that had emerged in the post-1991 era (2005, p.28).

⁷ See Lovell, 'Literature and Entertainment in Russia: A Brief History' (2005, pp.14-15) for further detail on the groups that Bulgarin identified.

Lovell's second chapter, 'Reading the Russian Popular' (2005, pp.29-38), extends and develops the history that he sets out for popular literature in the first chapter by exploring 'how Russian formulas can be categorised and what they can tell us' (2005, p.29). The fact that Lovell has qualified the formulas of popular literature with the term 'Russian' immediately suggests that there is a significant difference between popular literary genres in the West and those that have emerged in Russia, and he uses this chapter to introduce the subsequent chapters in the book, which focus on different formulas and explore them in the Russian context. In addition to this, Lovell highlights the work that has been done in post-Soviet Russia in recognition of the popular genres. He notes that 'from 1997 the prominent daily *Nezavisimaya gazeta* has published a regular supplement on mass literature' and that *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 'has given mass literature sustained attention in several of its issues' (2005, pp.31-32), suggesting that Russian literary critics have finally recognised that even if they could not perceive any value in popular literature, they had at least to acknowledge its existence. In addition to those sections discussed below, which are directly relevant to this thesis, Lovell and Menzel's volume also includes a chapter on Russian science-fiction and fantasy (2005, pp.117-150) thus reinforcing the role that this type of literature continues to play on the post-Soviet literary scene, just as it did in the Soviet era.

In her chapter, 'Russian Detective Fiction' (2005, pp.57-100), Maria Koreneva starts with an attempt to define the detective novel, arguing that Western terminology does not adequately meet the needs of the Russian critic when analysing detective fiction. However, she reaches the conclusion that there is a basic formula to which the detective novel must adhere if it is to be considered detective fiction: it must, in the first instance, contain an action that deviates from the accepted norms of a community, and second, it must see the reversion back to these norms as the crime is solved and the perpetrator punished (2005, p.58). Having established the key traits of the Russian detective novel, Koreneva proceeds, through the use of case studies, to explore the history of detective fiction and adventure stories in Russia, from as early as 1620. After examining the adventure stories of the pre-revolutionary period (2005, pp.58-69), she continues by looking at the adventure and crime tales that were present in the Soviet era, reinforcing Lovell's suggestion that popular genres endured throughout the years 1917-1991 (2005, pp.69-85).

The sections of Koreneva's chapter that are most relevant to this thesis are the last three: 'contemporary detective fiction' (2005, pp.85-86); 'women's detective writing'

(2005, pp.86-95); and 'men's detective writing' (2005, pp.95-98). Koreneva notes that in the post-Soviet era, in particular from 1996-7 onwards, publishers have attempted to make the detective fiction that they produce fit into a series (2005, p.85). Furthermore, Koreneva observes that there has been a significant divide between detective stories for women, and those written for men (2005, p.86). It is not surprising that Koreneva's first example of detective fiction written for, and by, a woman is Aleksandra Marinina and she draws on texts written by Marina Serova and Darya Dontsova to further illustrate her points. By way of comparison, Koreneva also offers some comment on men's detective writing (2005, pp.95-98), but devotes significantly fewer words to the subject. However, she does comment on Akunin's series *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-), arguing that his reason for setting the series in the past is so he can 'permit himself a slower tempo of narration, he can see to it that the culprit is caught and know that that will be good enough for readers who want to receive a nostalgic positive impression of the state' (Koreneva 2005, p.97). Furthermore, Koreneva suggests that Akunin cultivates an 'optimism of memory' that provides his readers a 'refuge' from life (2005, p.97), a notion with which other critics do not always agree. Koreneva reaches a valid conclusion (2005, pp.97-100), contending that Russian detective fiction has similar traits to Western detective fiction, but that there are some elements that make it distinctly Russian. She suggests that there is a different sense of who the criminal is in Russian detective fiction, and that the perpetrator of the crime may have been driven to his or her actions because of social circumstances. Furthermore, the state is often part of the reason why the criminal has been forced to act as he or she has done. Koreneva concludes that detective fiction is often produced through a 'collective' authorship whereby the greatest fears of a community are explored before the 'crime' is solved, and equilibrium is regained.

Following on from Koreneva and her brief words on 'men's detective writing', Dubin's chapter 'The Action Thriller (*Boevik*) in Contemporary Russia' (2005, pp.101-116) goes some way to filling in the gaps that Koreneva's chapter left. Dubin argues that there are several key characteristics that all of the heroes of the *boeviki* share, and the traits that he identifies proved a useful gauge against which to measure Erast Fandorin, Akunin's hero. Through the exploration of the key traits that heroes of the *boeviki* share, Dubin asserts that this type of literature represents the function of mass literature in post-Soviet Russia (2005, p.116). He argues that the *boeviki* went some way to providing the readers with an assessment of how society had changed and that the experiences of the hero corresponded in some

ways with the experiences of the population as a whole. The most relevant point that Dubin makes about the *boeviki* in relation to this thesis is that the number reading these hard-boiled detective stories in more recent years is falling and that the 'general interest' in these stories is gradually shifting 'in favour of the psychological family novel' (2005, p.116).

The final section of Lovell and Menzel's edited volume which is of particular relevance to this thesis is Mariia Cherniak's article 'Russian Romantic Fiction' (2005, pp.151-172), which details the brief history that romantic fiction had in Russia before exploring how the genre has risen in popularity since 1991. Cherniak argues that one of the key reasons why these types of text rose to prominence among women from all sections of society was because of serialisation and the presentation of information in a format that had not previously been accessible. Cherniak suggests that women had been 'starved of popular publications on gender issues in Soviet times' (2005, p.155) and were therefore eager to discover what opportunities they had missed out on under Soviet rule, and how to cope with the new chances and changes that were rapidly coming their way. In spite of the insights that translated fiction provided Russian readers, the content was not of particular relevance to readers in Russia and, unsurprisingly, Russian variations emerged quickly, and were taken up by publishers who were keen to expand their various series (2005, p.158).

The rise and dominance of *glamor* in Russia has provided significant areas for discussion. In her article 'Russian Discourse on Glamour' (2008, pp.4-8), Menzel outlines seven features of glamour and explores these traits as presented in the 'glossy' magazines, Andrei Konchalovsky's film *Glyanets* (2007), and Dmitri V. Ivanov's book *Glem-kapitalizm* (2008). Menzel defines glamour as 'a mixture of the new elite's ostentatious self-representation and a universal cult of luxury, fashion and an exotic and erotic lifestyle promoted by the mass-media' (2008, p.4) that is a reaction to the chaos of the 1990s, and has become 'a matter of national pride' (2008, p.4). Menzel's view that *glamor* has evolved into a new national idea is supported by Larisa Rudova in her article 'Uniting Russia in Glamour' (2008, pp.2-3) and by Olga Mesropova in "'The Discreet Charm of the Russian Bourgeoisie": OKsana (*sic*) Robski and Glamour in Russian Popular Literature' (2009, pp.89-101), who both agree that the Putin era heralded something of a new beginning after the Yeltsin era and the stability associated with this change has allowed the culture of *glamor* to evolve. Mesropova uses Robski's novel *Ca\$ual* (2005) to explore the

notion of *glamur* and understand its implications for contemporary society. Mesropova argues that the movement away from the 1990s and the associated chaos is represented by the death of the heroine's husband in the opening pages of the novel (2009, p.99), yet this seems a little too simplistic given that the heroine is involved in all sorts of 'shady' dealings herself, not least of all the hiring of a hit man to avenge her husband's murder. For both Rudova and Mesropova, *glamur* has enabled the 'New Russians' to demonstrate that they are no longer the same people as they were in the 1990s. Mesropova suggests that the image of the New Russian tended to 'connote a dubious background, intellectual impotence, as well as an absence of moral standards and cultural sophistication' (2009, p.93), but that the era of *glamur* has enabled Russia's *nouveaux riches* to evolve into 'successful, respectable, "hardworking bourgeois"' (2009, p.94), a sentiment with which Rudova appears to agree: 'under Putin, [the New Russians'] initial image underwent a transformation from vulgar and vicious criminals in brightly coloured jackets and gold necklaces to a hard-working, educated and stylish *haute bourgeoisie*' (2008, p.2). However, such an assertion does not necessarily appear to be borne out in the texts either of these writers uses in order to illustrate their point, namely works by Oksana Robski, whose heroines may dabble with employment, but who do not necessarily meet any of the other criteria mentioned by Rudova. In spite of any reservations about the assessment of *glamur* in the context of New Russians and their post-Yeltsin transformation, the assertion that the phenomenon is a reaction to the days of *chernukha* is convincingly argued by Mesropova, and her article raises the very valid point that *glamur* is a 'gloss' and that there is still the opportunity for darkness to appear, even in the lives of those living a '*glamorous*' lifestyle (2009, pp.95-97). This point also appears in contrast with Mesropova's suggestion that Robski's text departs from the traditional 'rags to riches' fairy-tale (2009, p.90). While Mesropova is correct in her assessment that it is not a traditional fairy tale in this sense, the elements of *chernukha* that run through the story encourage the reader to see that the heroine has had to endure some hardship so she is in many ways entitled to her 'happy-ending'.

HOW DOES THIS RESEARCH FIT INTO PREVIOUS SCHOLARLY STUDIES

As discussed in the 'Review of Previous Literature', there have been several texts that explore the fate of Russian literature in the 1990s and 2000s. Although Shneidman has written two books which cover Russian literature from 1988 until 2002, his studies do not consider in depth any of the research areas that I have outlined and they are essentially devoted to assessing various authors' works to illustrate his key points. He provides useful details about the state of the literary journals at the end of the Soviet period, but he does little to update this information in his second text *Russian Literature 1995-2002* (2004). Lovell's book, printed in 2000, concentrates predominantly on the Soviet era, and mentions the post-1991 situation only in the final chapter. This thesis will focus on the period after 1996, although clearly some reference to the 1980s and early 1990s will have to be included. *Literature, History and Identity in post-Soviet Russia, 1991-2006* (2007) by Marsh goes some way to updating the position of literature since 1991. However, her text documents what has happened in Russian literature during this timeframe, focusing in particular on historical fiction, and she does not seek to update the reader on the specific role that literature now plays in post-Soviet Russia.

Very little has been written about the Russian publishing industry since Gregory Walker published his text *Soviet book publishing policy* (1978). The rate of change in the Russian book market has been rapid. Although there is now something of a free market operating in Russia, questions concerning the state influence on what publishers print have to be raised. This study will attempt to update the information available about the post-Soviet book market, and evaluate the extent to which the state continues to influence the books that are printed. Furthermore, this research will aim to identify the extent to which the decisions made by publishers are directly influenced by the demands of the reading public, and which are governed by their desire simply to make a profit.

In the early 1990s, the fate of the literary journal was a significant topic for debate in both Russia and the West. Since 1995, the future of the literary journal no longer concerns academics in the way that it did. The editors of the various literary journals are clearly worried about their survival, but relatively little has been written in English language sources about their situation in the latter part of the 1990s and the 2000s. Furthermore, the state's decision to offer financial support to some journals, notably *Novyi mir*, surely prompts questions about a return to old methods of

leadership control, something which is currently not documented in English or Russian material.

Although there has been a growing debate in the Russian press about the possible emergence of a cult of personality around Putin, the discussion among Western academics has been relatively muted.⁸ There is also a distinct divide between those who feel that *Putinmania* is just a bit of fun, and those who are concerned that his increased presence in the print media and literature is representative of something more sinister. In the absence of much academic writing on the question of politics and literature since the mid-1990s, this thesis will endeavour to evaluate the material that has appeared and the extent to which it represents a return to the former Soviet methods of glorifying and legitimising the nation's leader.

No study of Russian literature would be complete without a consideration of the role of the writer since the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly in the light of the vociferous debate that has been raging about the status of the writer and the quality of the literature that is being produced. In the mid-2000s, Lovell and Menzel's edited book *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective* (2005) considers a number of elements of popular literature that have risen to greater prominence since the collapse of the USSR. Their collection of essays has provided an invaluable starting point for the final chapter of this thesis, and it has been interesting to note how rapidly the literary field alters in just a few years.

Arguably, the focus of this study on literature and its role since the collapse of the Soviet Union is also something of a rarity. Given that other pastimes now govern Russians' leisure time and that the prestige of literature is no longer what it was, a large number of academics have turned their attention towards these other things, which has no doubt been literature's loss. The broad scope of this study will hopefully address some of the gaps that have been left by the attraction of studying 'new' areas of Russian life.

⁸ Since writing this thesis, there have been several publications which address Putin's popularity and its various manifestations in different media. Johnson's article 'Putin and Emptiness: The Place of Satire in the Contemporary Cult of Personality' appeared in May 2009, and was followed in October 2010 by Cassiday and Johnson's article 'Putin, Putiniana and the Question of a Post-Soviet Cult of Personality'.

METHODOLOGY

Having outlined the theoretical framework against which this thesis will evaluate the role of Russian literature and established that there remain valid reasons for studying the function of literature in the post-Soviet era, this thesis will focus on how the collapse of the Soviet regime altered, or failed to alter, the role of Russian literature between 1996 and 2008. The period 1996 to 2008 was chosen as it covers Yeltsin's second presidential term and both of Putin's terms as President of the Russian Federation. The decision to omit Yeltsin's first presidential term was taken because there is a substantial amount of academic literature relating to the period 1991 to 1996. In examining the various roles that Russian literature plays, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the continued relevance of literature in post-Soviet Russia.

This thesis will:

- explore what impact the emergence of a capitalist-style market has had on the production, circulation and consumption of literature;
- examine the relationship between literature and politics and investigate whether this relationship has changed between 1996 and 2008;
- consider the educational function of literature and evaluate the extent to which the writer is still expected to answer the 'big questions'; and
- explore whether literature continues to be discussed as widely in the post-Soviet era and what place Russian popular literature has on the contemporary literary scene as it was in the Soviet era.

The approaches used to address each of these areas vary; therefore it is sensible to outline the methods by chapter. Chapter One examines the commercial role of literature from the publishers' perspective. Three publishers, *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks* are used as case studies. Further details about each of these can be found in the publishing chapter. The rationale for choosing these three publishers lies in the fact that they offer a comparison between Moscow and the regions, and between former-state and privately-owned enterprises. Each has regularly featured in the 'top ten' for number of titles and number of copies produced during the 2000s. All three publishers produce a range of texts, with a particular focus on literary fiction. Quantitative data for each publisher were compiled from the online database hosted on the website belonging to the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata*. In addition to the quantitative data collected, analysis of the state initiatives to support the publishing industry and laws on literature and the mass media were carried out. In

the case of the *Special Federal Programmes*, which outlined the specific support for publishers, the Russian texts were available through the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications website. An analysis of industry literature, such as the magazine *Vestnik* produced by the *Assotsiatsiya knigorasprostranitelei nezavisimykh gosudarstv (ASKR)* was also used. *Vestnik* provides detailed yearly analysis of the book trade in Russia, which offered a point of comparison for the data that were collected with respect to the publishers used as the case studies in this chapter.

Chapter Two draws on the experiences of *Novyi mir*, *Znamya* and *Afisha* as the case studies. Once again, detailed information about each of these journals can be found in the chapter. The reason for using these three publications was to explore the Soviet and post-Soviet experiences of the literary journals. Quantitative data on the reviews that each of these journals published between 1996 and 2008 were compiled from <http://magazines.russ.ru>. Annual publications by the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications have provided valuable data about the state of the 'glossy' magazine market in general. In addition to the quantitative data collection, interviews with journal editors were conducted. These interviews provided anecdotal evidence to reinforce the initial hypotheses about the way in which the role of literature had changed between 1996 and 2008. The academic and media discussion regarding the fate of the literary journals also proved useful. The debate concerning the journals was fairly vociferous in both the Russian- and English-speaking world in the 1990s, but this debate has continued only in Russian sources in the 2000s. Russian newspaper, radio and television reports have been used to further understand the position of the journals.

The question of political influence in literature is particularly pertinent to post-Soviet literature because of the relationship between politics and literature prior to 1991, so the focus of Chapter Three is on the political function of literature. Maksim Kononenko's vignettes that appear on the website www.vladimir.vladimirovich.ru (2002 to the present), short stories from Dmitrii Bykov's collection *Kak Putin stal prezidentom SShA* (2005, *How Putin Became the President of the USA*) and Viktor Teterin's two plays *Putin.doc* (2005) and *Preemnik.doc* (2007) are the case studies in this chapter. Interviews with contemporary writers provide further commentary on the way in which the role of literature has changed between 1996 and 2008, as do materials in the Russian press, which has speculated on the emergence of a Putin cult of personality.

The final areas through which the various functions of literature will be explored are the writer and popular literature. Chapter Four will explore the experiences of Boris Akunin (1956-) and Oksana Robski (1968-) and will illustrate how writers have had to adjust to a new status and to changing reader expectations in the post-Soviet era, and how these changes have affected the debate about literature and its value. Akunin's series *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-) and Robski's texts *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) will provide the case studies. Quantitative data have been collected from the online database of the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata*, and issues of *Vestnik* have corroborated these data. There has been extensive discussion in the Russian *publitsistika*, and this material has been used to further inform the conclusions reached when discussing the writer and popular literature.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

The aim of this chapter is to examine the role of creative literature as a commercial product marketed to make money. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused the ideological notion that culture should not be traded in order to make a profit to become defunct. In the post-Soviet era, Russians have continued to read, but publishers have sought to market the book as a commodity that people cannot do without – for the publisher, the post-Soviet function of literature is to make money. Yet, vestiges of the former regime remain, and the old Soviet view that literature could be used to influence the masses continues to hold a place in the leadership's collective mind. This chapter will explore the notion that the publishing industry and the literature that reaches the shelves continue to be influenced by politics, even in a commercial environment.

This chapter will begin with an outline of the economic impact that the Soviet regime had on publishing policy and the ideological way in which book production and reading were perceived. It will look briefly at the Soviet period and examine the legacy that the post-Soviet publishing industry is attempting to overcome. It will explore the areas outlined above, looking first at the commercial aspect of literature where its function is that of saleable commodity; and second at the political influence that is exerted on the literature that is produced. In an attempt to provide a context for the Russian market on the world scene, this chapter will offer some comparisons with the publishing industry in other countries. It is important to note that in some instances, for example when discussing the total print run and number of titles, this chapter deals with books in general rather than literary fiction. Finally, the experiences of three publishing houses: *Eksmo*, a private publisher based in Moscow, *Raduga*, a state-owned publishing house in Moscow and *Feniks*, a private publisher located in Rostov-on-Don, will be examined.

THE SOVIET PUBLISHING LEGACY

In order to illustrate the legacy that the Soviet leadership left behind after the collapse of the USSR, this section will identify the chief aims of the Soviet authorities with regard to the book industry, the ways in which they attempted to achieve their goals, and the outcomes of their actions – intended or otherwise. This section will look first at the practical aspects of publishing and then examine the impact of Soviet ideology on book production and distribution.

THE PLANNED ECONOMY

One of the key features that marked the Soviet publishing industry as entirely different from any market-oriented equivalent was the way that centralised party control removed any autonomy from the publisher, who was left with no control over what he (or she) produced. The Soviet authorities believed that without central planning, certain texts, including ‘highly specialised works and books in minority languages [...] would never appear’ and that ‘demand and profitability [could not be] the sole guides in the matter of which books to publish’ (Walker 1978, p.22). The leadership was not concerned with what people wanted to read and instead dictated ‘exactly what types of literature the reader “needed” to read for his or her own betterment’. Strict control over publishing meant that ‘these “needs” (and only these “needs”) would be met’ (Dwyer 2007, p.296). From the 1930s, with the creation of the *Obedinenie gosudarstvennykh izdatelstv* (OGIZ, *Central State Publishing*), ‘the Soviet literary system [...] was based on planned centralised publishing and distribution according to long-term programmes. Print-runs were determined with no reference to likely reader demand or market research’ (Menzel 2005, p.43).

Although the goods produced by the publishing industry were of the *nematerialnoe* (intangible) variety, and it was frequently suggested that the economics of this industry could not be compared directly to those industries engaged in *materialnoe proizvodstvo* (industrial production) (Walker 1978, p.7), the structures that governed publishers, the way in which plans were drawn up and executed, and the distribution of the goods produced were not very different from the administration that governed the manufacturing industry. Just as other industries were controlled by various committees, councils and ministries that oversaw every aspect of production, so too was the publishing industry. The state monopoly of the publishing industry was firmly established by 1930, but by 1963, in order to strengthen ideological control over publishers, it was necessary to reorganise the network of central and regional

publishers and form them into specialised publishing houses (Kuznetsov 2006, p.15), which were directed by the *Komitet po pechatu pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR* (*The Committee for Print of the Council of Ministers of the USSR*). The committee controlling publishing in the Soviet Union was renamed on several occasions. In 1973, it became the *Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po delam izdatelstv, poligrafii, i knizhnoi trgovli* (*Goskomizdat SSSR, The USSR State Committee for Publishing, Printing and the Book Trade*), and was reincarnated again as the *Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po pechatu* (*The USSR State Committee for Print*). Shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, publishing was controlled by the *Ministerstvo informatsii i pechatu SSSR* (*The USSR Ministry for Information and Print*), which was dissolved in November 1991 when the USSR disintegrated (Kuznetsov 2006, pp.15-16). Every aspect of publishing was controlled by the Soviet leadership: 'from paper distribution to determining who could be an author to deciding what books could be printed in what quantities and sold for what price, [everything was] under centralized party control' (Dwyer 2007, p.296).⁹ The level of control exerted by the state over who was even entitled to be a writer was exemplified when Josef Brodsky, on trial for 'social parasitism', was asked by the judge 'who has recognized you as a poet? Who has enrolled you in the ranks of poets?' In reply, Brodsky asserted 'no one. Who enrolled me in the ranks of the human race?' (cited in McFadden 1996). *Goskompechat SSSR* (in its various manifestations) directly oversaw publishers, printing enterprises, the publication of journals and newspapers (including *V mire knig* (*In the World of Books*), *Poligrafiya* (*Printing*), *Detskaya literatura* (*Children's Literature*) and *Knizhnoe obozrenie* (*The Book Review*)), *Vsesoyuznaya knizhnaya palata* (the *All-Union Book Chamber*), *Soyuzkniga* (the *All-Union Wholesale-Retail Association*) and *Mezhdunarodnaya kniga* (the *All-Union International-Economic Association*). In turn, many of the direct subordinates of *Goskompechat SSSR* had subsidiaries of their own. *Soyuzkniga* controlled various book trade enterprises, the *Vsesoyuznaya knizhnaya palata* was in charge of research institutes and engineering centres, while *Mezhdunarodnaya*

⁹ See Karaichentseva, 'Sovremennoe literaturno-khudozhestvennoe knigoizdanie Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Konspekt Lektsii' (2000) for greater detail on the way in which publishers and also publishing houses of public organisations and departments, of creative unions and of the Academy of Sciences, universities and institutes were regulated. Karaichentseva (2000) discusses the fact that all of the above were further regulated by the corresponding union or by the union republic in order to form a united political system of the state.

kniga organised international exhibitions and fairs and ran the *Knigoeksport* (*Book Export*) association.

Multiple problems arose from such a rigid planning structure that paid little heed to reader demand. From the industry perspective the 'lack of consultation between the publishing system and the book trade [meant that] booksellers had no choice in what they sold: they simply had to distribute the books they were presented with' (Lovell 1998, p.683). Publishers and sellers were unable to operate independently from one another: 'not only [was] the Soviet book trade the only channel through which the publisher [could] make his sales,' both were subsectors of 'one centrally planned and administered industrial and distributive operation' (Walker 1978, p.91). The long-term nature of the plans that were implemented at the beginning of each five-year cycle meant that it was virtually impossible to make any changes. Publishers and sellers were asked to predict the inputs that they required and they were expected to adapt should any part of the original plan be disrupted. Mehnert cites paper used for works of fiction as an example of the level of control that *Goskompechat SSSR* (in its various incarnations) had over the publishing industry: 'the decision on paper allocation for the printing of fiction is made at various levels of the planning apparatus. Four pivotal decisions have to be made before printing can start: first, how much paper is to be produced for books; second, how much of it will be allotted to fiction; third, how much of that will each of the various publishing firms of the country receive; and fourth, how much will each author be allocated' (1983, p.19).

Inevitably, the problems that arose between publishers and the book trade had an impact on the reader, where the pattern of surplus and shortage was replicated as it was in so many other industries. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to address reader demand for particular types of texts. For example, in the period 1975-1980, it was decided that the 'entire planned increase in [...] paper supplies [would be dedicated] to raising the output of fiction' (Walker 1978, p.105). Other efforts to provide readers with the books that they wanted included book exchange (whereby readers could take their book(s) to a state shop and swap them), the *makulatura* system (which encouraged readers to bring a specified quantity of paper to a recycling point where they would receive a coupon which could be 'spent' on a book from a list of 'shortage' titles), and the loan of popular books that could be read

on the premises of *punkty kollektivnogo pervoprochteniya*.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, there was an active black market where books that were in demand could be bought and sold. For some publishers, Gorbachev's reforms meant a relaxation of the regime's rigidly planned economy. From 1986 publishers had a limited opportunity to decide their own book catalogue and in what quantities to publish these texts. However, other planning structures remained firmly in place, so any sense of freedom gained by being allowed to select which texts to publish was limited by other factors. The systems that were adopted in an attempt to solve the book shortage illustrate the lengths to which the Soviet authorities were prepared to go in order to protect their ideological values and to prevent the book from becoming an 'ordinary', household commodity.

THE IDEOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE BOOK

Lovell suggests that 'it is actually very hard to conceptualise the place of culture in any economic system' (1998, p.679), and it was a challenge that the Soviets endeavoured to confront. The authorities, publishers and readers were given to understand that 'a book, though a commodity, is a special kind of commodity; and secondly that its status in a socialist society is qualitatively different from its status under capitalism' (Walker 1978, p.7). Therefore, 'publishing policy followed the goal and principle of educating a homogenised society through the controlled publication of a clearly shaped canon of literature' (Menzel 2005, p.43). Due to the significance placed on books, every aspect of book production, from writing, to publication, to sales, was influenced by the leadership's ideological stance.

'It is claimed that a Soviet author [did] not "sell" a "product", as an author would to a capitalist publisher, because the fee he receive[d] was] for the use of his work in the interests of all society, whereas the capitalist publishing house ha[d] the two aims of maximum profit and of serving the interests of a bourgeois society' (Kamyshev cited in Walker 1978, p.7). 'Kiosks should perform their function of political education' and those selling books were encouraged to think of themselves as "cultural workers" rather than "sellers" who should

¹⁰ See Lovell, 'Publishing and the Book Trade in the Post-Stalin Era: A Case-Study of the Commodification of Culture' (1998, pp.683-689) for greater detail on how the Soviet authorities addressed the *defitsit* and the varying degrees of success that these policies enjoyed.

‘not seek profits, but rather educate their readers’ (Lovell 1998, p.682).

Just as reader demand and market research were dismissed as a capitalist gimmick not required for the Soviet Union’s planned economy, so too was reader demand ignored when planners and censors, along with writers, chose which texts to publish. The Soviet leadership had quickly recognised that the printed word could be used to educate the population according to Soviet ways of thinking and it presumed to know what readers ‘needed’ to read in order to become good Soviet citizens. Such an opinion meant that the texts selected as ‘valuable’ for the development of society were not always appreciated by readers, who held different ideas about the types of works that they wanted to read.

The consequences of this ideological approach to book production caused similar problems to those created by the rigid planning structure – a shortage of texts that the public wanted to read. In addition, the ideological constraints had an impact on the intellectual welfare of the population. In the 1930s, the relatively unsophisticated readership was content to read the majority of texts produced by the Socialist Realist writers. By the 1970s, readers could see the transparency of state-approved plots and were no longer satisfied by these types of texts.

Conclusions

In theory, the disintegration of the Soviet Union left publishers with the opportunity to publish whatever they wanted. Indeed, it could be argued that the tight control exercised over the publishing industry and the associated problems of ‘book-hunger’ actually provided something of a positive legacy. Due to the shortages, post-Soviet publishers had the opportunity to make huge profits by exploiting the numerous gaps in the book market. Kalianina (cited in Dwyer 2007, p.309), identifies ‘the “literary deficits” of the Soviet period [as] foreign literature from popular genres: crime fiction, adventure, science fiction’, and these were the openings in the market that post-Soviet publishers sought to fill. However, in the longer term, the impact that Soviet-era policies had on publishing has been harder to overcome. Such tight Party control inevitably led to several problems, which were further exacerbated as the publishing industry attempted to adapt to a market system almost overnight.

Under the *Ministerstvo informatsii i pechati SSSR* (*The USSR Ministry for Information and Print*) (as it was in 1991, prior to the collapse), every aspect of the

industry, from publishing, to promotion, to selling, was controlled. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the entire distribution system on which publishers relied vanished. Even in the 2000s, independent post-Soviet publishers are trying to solve the problems associated with distribution; of getting their books to the readers who want to read them. Overcoming the Moscow-centricity of the former Soviet publishing industry has been hard, particularly given the lack of infrastructure or the means with which to attempt such a feat.

The artificially high cost of foreign-produced books combined with the financial support and subsidies on raw materials that publishers had enjoyed until 1991 also had a significant impact on their post-Soviet position. In 1992, the cost of paper rose dramatically in Russia and publishers found themselves forced to request state support in order to remain competitive with foreign imports. In order to retain a strong publishing industry in Russia, governmental assistance was granted in the form of *Special Federal Programmes* which ran from 1996-2001 and from 2002-2005 (Government of the Russian Federation 1995 and Government of the Russian Federation 2001). In light of continued support provided by the state, questions have been raised over the publishing industry's freedom to publish anything it believes will answer public demand.

Ideological values have proven hard to overcome. For almost seventy years, Russian readers and publishers had been exposed to propaganda claiming that the Soviet Union was the best-read nation in the world. In the post-Soviet era, publishers continue to be concerned with such statistics and are now competing to be the highest publishing nation in the world. From a structural point of view, the ministries that have overseen post-Soviet publishing have found it hard to distance themselves from their Soviet predecessors. Even as recently as 2004, the *Federalnoe agenstvo po pechati i massovym kommunikatsiyam Rossii* (*Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation*) was restructured because of concerns that too many Soviet faces had retained positions of power: although the Soviet Union might have come to an end, its various structures and those working in them were still playing a role more than a decade after its disintegration. The following sections of this chapter will discuss the ways in which the post-Soviet publishing industry has sought to overcome the legacy that the Soviet era left behind, looking specifically at the commercialisation of literature and at the continued use of literature as a political tool.

IN PURSUIT OF PROFIT: THE COMMERCIAL ROLE OF LITERATURE FROM THE PUBLISHERS' PERSPECTIVE

In something of a departure from its earlier role as an 'institution of enlightenment and moral education, as the conscience of the nation' (Menzel 2005, p.39), literature in the post-Soviet era has been viewed as a means by which the post-Soviet publisher can make money. As the commercial potential of literature was realised in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a significant shift in the number and the location of publishing houses. The collapse of the command economy also allowed for the privatisation of the publishing industry, and a different form of monopolisation to take hold. These changes had a notable impact on the output of the publishing industry, where publishing houses found themselves in the relatively new position of independence and were fully entitled to make their own decisions about the texts that they published. This section of the chapter will explore the impact that the commercialisation of literature has had on the publishing industry and the way in which these changes affected the texts released onto the market.

THE POST-SOVIET PUBLISHER BOOM

The transition to the market economy occurred almost overnight. Russian publishers were in the new position of trading books simply as commodities to be bought and sold at a price determined by market demand. Soviet book shortages had provided publishers with gaps in the market that were ready to be filled and the opportunities for profit in the early 1990s were taken up by numerous would-be publishers. In addition the 'Law on the Press and Other Mass Media', which declared the freedom of the press and the end of censorship, and made changes to the way in which licences for publishing activities were granted, was adopted in 1991. In just ten years, the number of publishers operating in the Russian Federation increased more than seventeen-fold, from 284 in 1990, to more than 5,100 in 2000 and reaching a peak in 2003 with almost 6,200 publishers functioning. Some commentators have suggested that as many as 11,000 publishing enterprises of varying nature were operating in 1998 (Karaichentseva 2000). In 2000, more than half of publishing organisations had received licences in the period from mid-1991 to mid-1993 (Karaichentseva 2000). Clearly, there were significant opportunities for private publishing enterprises in the immediate post-Soviet era and the possibility of

making a profit from literature was acted on by thousands of individuals and groups of individuals.¹¹

In addition to the vast increase in the number of publishing enterprises that emerged in the first decade of the capitalist era, the Moscow-centric nature of the publishing industry was starting to be rivalled by the appearance of publishers in the regions.

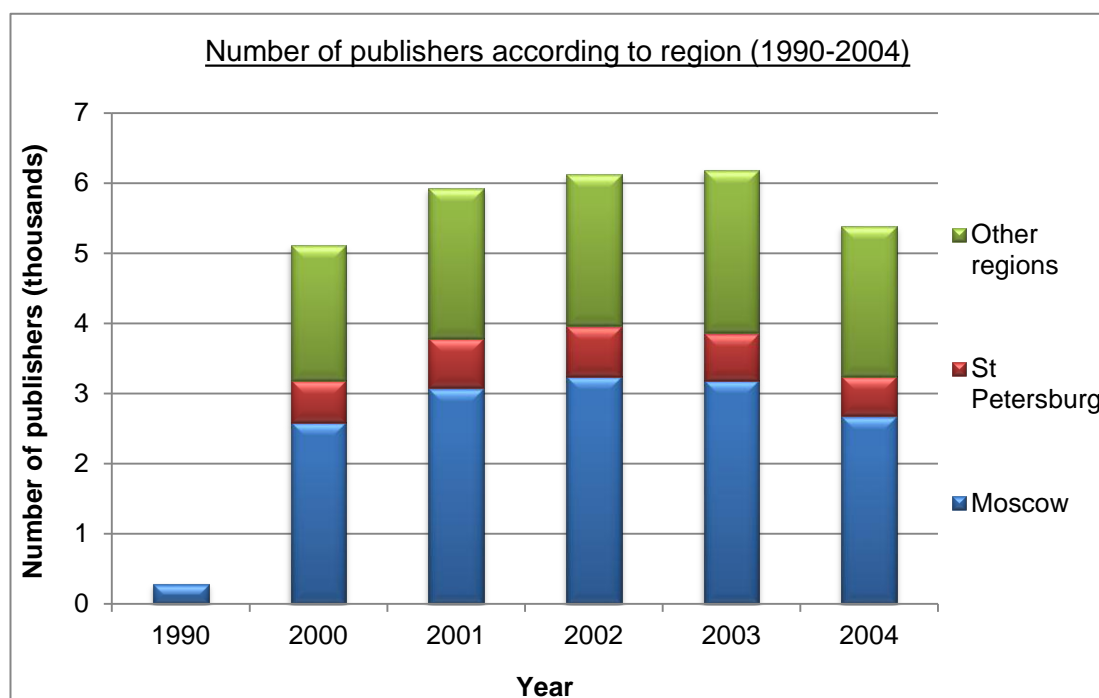


Figure 1: Number of publishers according to region (1990-2004) (Lensky 2004a)

Although publishing in Russia remains concentrated in Moscow, where around fifty per cent of publishers are located, figures for 2001-2004 show a small decline in the

¹¹ The figure of 284 is from Kuznetsov, *Ekonomika i organizatsiya izdatelskoi deyatel'nosti* (2006, p.22) and the figures of 5,100 and 6,200 are from Lensky, 'Itogi knigoizdaniya v 2003 godu' (2004a). Figures for the total number of publishers operating in the Soviet Union vary, see Sirozhenko, 'Statisticheskii obzor knigoizdaniya Rossiiskoi Federatsii v 2004 godu' (2005), who states that there were never more than 250 publishers in the USSR, compared with Menzel, 'Writing, Reading and Selling Literature in Russia 1986-2004' (2005, p.42), who suggests that until the early 1980s there were around 100 publishers across the Soviet Union and Karaichentseva 'Sovremennoe literaturno-khudozhestvennoe knigoizdanie Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Konspekt Lektsii' (2000), who suggests that the number of publishers in 1989 was 240. Yet all agree that most publishers were either in Moscow or another large city. Perhaps the discrepancy arises from the way in which Soviet publishing was managed. It is possible that Kuznetsov is counting all publishing enterprises, whereas Menzel focuses simply on publishing houses. Post-Soviet figures for the number of publishers agree.

percentage of publishers who operate either in Moscow or in St. Petersburg from sixty-five per cent of the total in 2002 to sixty per cent in 2004. Sirozhenko (2005) notes that during the Soviet era, the majority of publishers operated in just a few large cities, which contrasts sharply with the figures for 2000, where 1,928 publishers were located in more than 227 'other' cities (i.e. not Moscow (including Greater Moscow) or St Petersburg (including the Leningrad oblast)). Of these 'other' cities, 195 of them had between one and twenty publishers (a total of 756 publishers) and thirty-two cities had more than twenty publishers (a total of 1,172 publishers). By 2003, although the total number of publishers had fallen slightly overall, the number of 'other' cities in which publishers operated had risen to 241 and the total number of publishers operating in cities other than Moscow or St Petersburg was 2,325.

THE PRIVATISATION OF THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

The phenomenal increase in the number of publishers operating in the Russian Federation and the dramatic rise in production in the post-Soviet period was due in no small part to the 1991 adoption of the 'Law on the Press and Other Mass Media' (Ilnitsky 2003). Yet, privatisation of state-run publishing houses was complicated. Karaichentseva (2000) argues that the privatisation process that state-owned publishing houses underwent in 1991 was carried out in an unconsidered and inconsistent manner. Although retained under federal ownership and having been granted complete freedom in deciding what to publish, these publishing houses found their finances were cut off and they were burdened with significant taxation that was on a par with the taxes paid by newly formed private publishers (Karaichentseva 2000). Unlike many of the other former state-run industries, publishing and literature were not such attractive moneymaking prospects. The *Special Federal Programme* (Government of the Russian Federation 1995) for supporting the Russian publishing industry notes that the reluctance to take over former state-run publishing houses was due to three main factors. The first of these was the relatively high capital investment needed for production. The second reason was the absence of serious interest among individuals in the privatisation of state enterprises, the low profitability of the printing business and the length of time it would take for a return on the investment to be seen. Finally, the third issue preventing serious interest in the publishing industry as a viable investment was the small size of many printing houses: ninety per cent employed between ten and twenty workers and were primarily engaged in printing local papers and texts with very low print runs.

In spite of the apparent reluctance of private individuals to invest in the publishing industry, there has been a significant change in the number of titles and total number of copies produced by the private market since the early 1990s. In 1991, the majority of titles, fifty-six per cent, and the majority of the total print run, seventy-two per cent, were released by state publishing houses.¹²

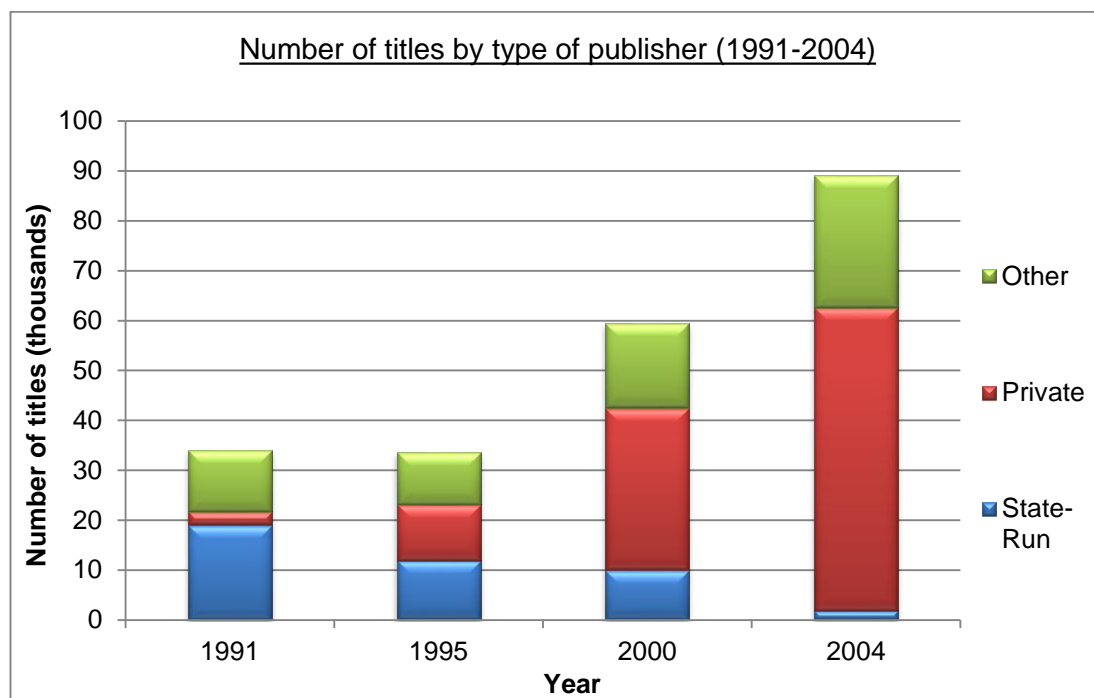


Figure 2: Number of titles by type of publisher (1991-2004).¹³ (Kuznetsov 2006)

¹² Other organisations, such as ministries, committees and departments, produced their own publications and are therefore included in these figures. Although they produce a significant number of titles, the print run for these texts is almost negligible.

¹³ These figures represent the total number of titles for all books, not solely fiction titles.

By 1995, private publishers had started to make their influence in the market felt, producing thirty-four per cent of the titles, compared with state publishing, which produced thirty-five per cent of the titles, and forty-seven per cent of the total print run, equalling that of the state-owned publishers' print run. By 2004, the 1991 situation had reversed and private publishers were producing sixty-eight per cent of the titles and ninety-one per cent of the total print run.

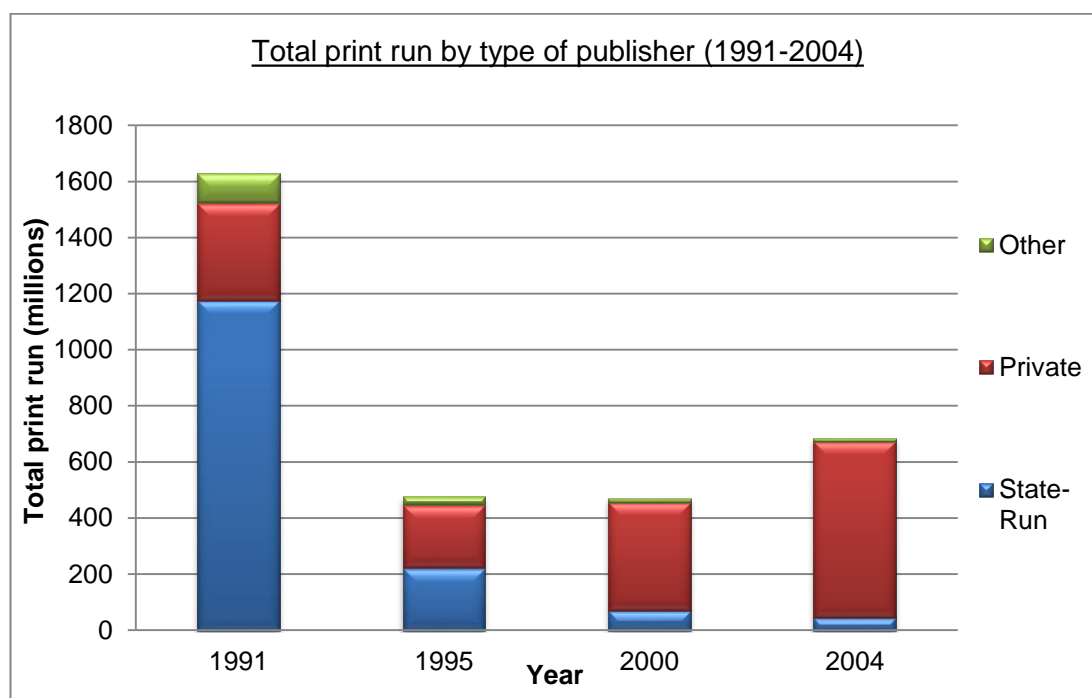


Figure 3: Total print run by type of publisher (1991-2004). (Kuznetsov 2006)

Privatisation of the publishing industry and the commercialisation of literature have allowed a group of the new publishers to take control of the market. The economic events of 1998 contributed to growing monopolisation: many new publishing companies were unable to survive. According to government statistics, in 1991, forty-six publishers produced more than 100 titles, by 1997, only twenty-two publishers released more than 100 titles, and of these, eighteen were new, private publishers (Karaichentseva 2000). A small number of publishers dominate the total print run. In 2004, seven publishers (*AST, Drofa, OLMA-Press, Prosveshchenie, Flamingo, Eksamin XXI and Eksmo*) produced forty-nine per cent of the total print run for the country (Sirozhenko 2005). Such changes to the composition of state and private publishing, not to mention the alterations to the location of publishers, have also had an impact on the number and type of text published.

PUBLISHING OUTPUT¹⁴

In spite of the dramatic increase in the number of publishers in the early 1990s, the number of titles, and consequently the diversity of the texts published, suffered. Russian commentators divide the texts that are published into nine categories: 'agricultural literature'; 'medical and sport-related literature'; 'philological sciences and art'; 'children's literature'; 'natural sciences'; 'technical literature'; 'education, culture, and communications literature'; 'fiction'; and 'political and socio-economic literature'. Clearly, not all of these categories are popular with all readers. In times of recession, even those categories which often perform well suffer, causing a contraction in the number of titles a publisher is prepared to risk producing. This was seen in the immediate post-Soviet period, when the number of titles dropped from 41,234 in 1990, to 34,050 in 1991, before falling to a low of 28,176 in 1992. Karaichentseva (2000) suggests that the considerable fall in the number of titles produced was due to two key factors. The first of these was the position of 'deep crisis' that state-owned publishers were in, and the second of which was the lack of experience of the new, private enterprises. These problems were compounded by other economic factors: the price of raw materials, in particular the cost of paper, the 1994 price of which was almost 1,200 times the 1991 price (Ilitsky 2003), had a major impact on the cost of book production. In addition to rising production costs, the buying power of the population was limited, especially when prices increased so rapidly: in 1989, the price for a book rose fourteen per cent on the 1988 price; in 1990, prices were up forty-nine per cent on the previous year, and in 1991, they rose almost 100 per cent on the 1990 price.¹⁵

¹⁴ The internationally accepted definition for a book or brochure, to which Russia adheres, is that a book comprises forty-nine or more pages and that a brochure has between five and forty-eight pages. Anything with fewer than five pages is not counted in these figures (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2004). At the Conference of the BASEES Group Twentieth-Century Literature and Beyond (Oxford, September 2008), Prof. Robert Porter raised a question about whether the print run figures include the publication of postcards, as they sometimes did during the Soviet period. If the Russian publishing industry is adhering to international standards and terminology, as Kuznetsov, *Ekonomika i organizatsiya izdatelskoi deyatel'nosti* (2006, p.36) claims it is, then there is no reason to think that postcards are included in the print run figures as produced by the Russian Book Chamber.

¹⁵ See Shevchenko 'Bread and circuses: shifting frames and changing references in ordinary Muscovites' political talk' (2001), for details of how 'ordinary' Russians were affected by the 1998 financial crisis and the changes in their buying habits.

In 1992, the total number of titles (28,176) fell below the number of titles published in Russia in 1913, when it was the second highest publishing nation in the world behind Germany (Karaichentseva 2000). Of course, in 1913, far fewer of the Russian population were literate, so a total number of titles around the 30,000 titles mark was impressive. However, the decline in the number of titles published did not continue beyond 1992. Unofficial state support for publishers had been in place since August 1992 (Kuznetsov 2006, p.33), although there was not a significant increase in the number of titles published until 1997 (45,026 titles), which Karaichentseva (2000) attributes to the official introduction of the *Federalnaya tselevaya programma 'Podderzhka gosudarstvennoi poligrafii i knigoizdaniya v Rossii v 1996-2001 godakh'* ('Programme of State Support for Mass Media and Publishing in the Russian Federation') introduced in 1996. (The impact of such state support packages will be discussed at greater length in the section on political influence.)

In subsequent years, there has continued to be an increase in the number of titles published. Even in 1998, the number of titles increased by 1,130. The only year in which the number of titles printed has decreased since 1992 was in 2002, when the total titles fell by 583. Lensky (2004a) suggests that the reason for this temporary drop was because the 'Programme of State support for Mass Media and Publishing in the Russian Federation' had ended in 2001 and there was some uncertainty over the renewal of state support for the book industry. Since 2003, the number of titles has increased, with the 100,000 titles mark being broken in 2006.¹⁶ (In order to further illustrate the position of Russian publishing, comparisons with the publishing industry in other countries will be made later in this chapter, see 'Is the Commercialisation of Literature the 'Normalisation' of Literature?' p.95.)

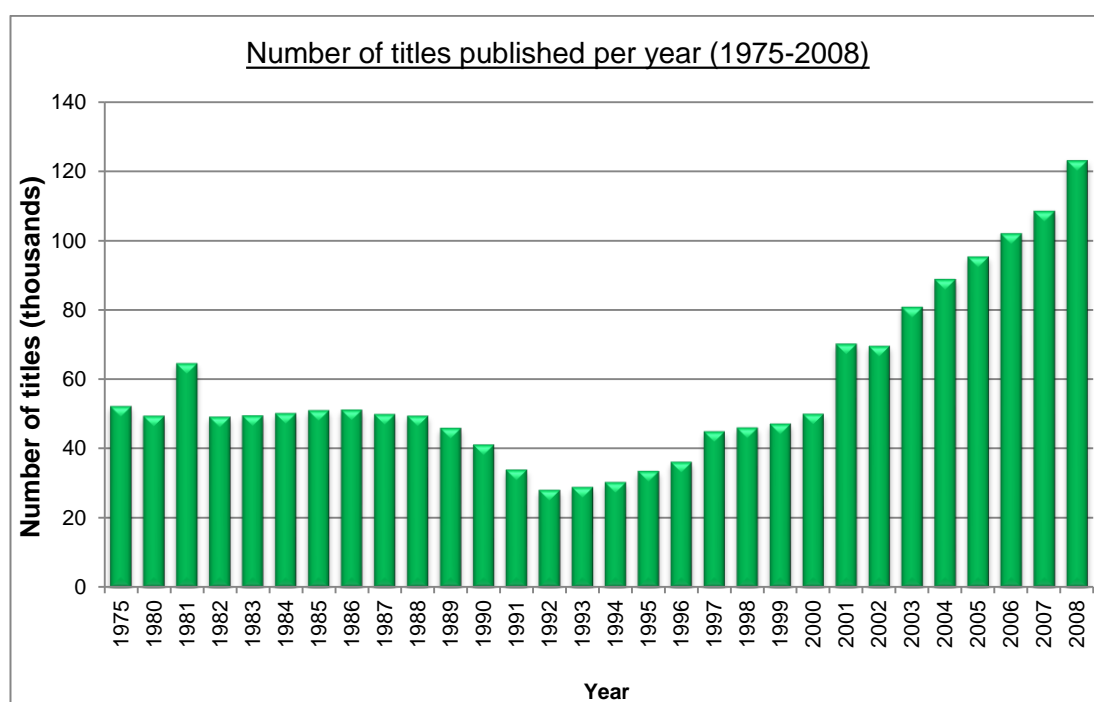


Figure 4: Number of titles published per year (1975-2008).¹⁷

The general increase in the number of titles printed has been replicated by the total print run, which has demonstrated an overall upward trend since the devaluation of

¹⁶ These figures represent the total number of titles published per year, not solely fiction titles.

¹⁷ The figures for the number of titles published per year were compiled from the following sources: 1975, 1980-85, 1987-88 - (Karaichentseva 2000); 1986, 1989-92 - (Kuznetsov 2006); 1993, 1995-98 - (International Publishers' Association 2001); 1994, 1999 - (Zassoursky 2001); 2000-01 - (Menzel 2005); 2002-03 - (Lensky 2004a); 2004-06 - (Sirozhenko 2005, 2006 and 2007); 2007-08 - (Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008 and 2009).

the rouble. The post-Soviet era print runs are in no way comparable with the enormous print runs of the late Soviet period, when the 1988 total print run topped 1,815 million copies. The print runs of the 2000s have averaged 620 million, just one third of the 1988 peak. Although the total print run in the early 1990s was undoubtedly affected by the pressures of price liberalisation and other economic issues that Russia was facing, the lowest total print run was in 1998, when 407 million copies were printed. It seems that the 1998 devaluation had an impact on the total print run even though it did not affect the total number of titles printed. Most Russian commentators pay little heed to the total print run figure, preferring instead to concentrate on the figure for the total number of titles.

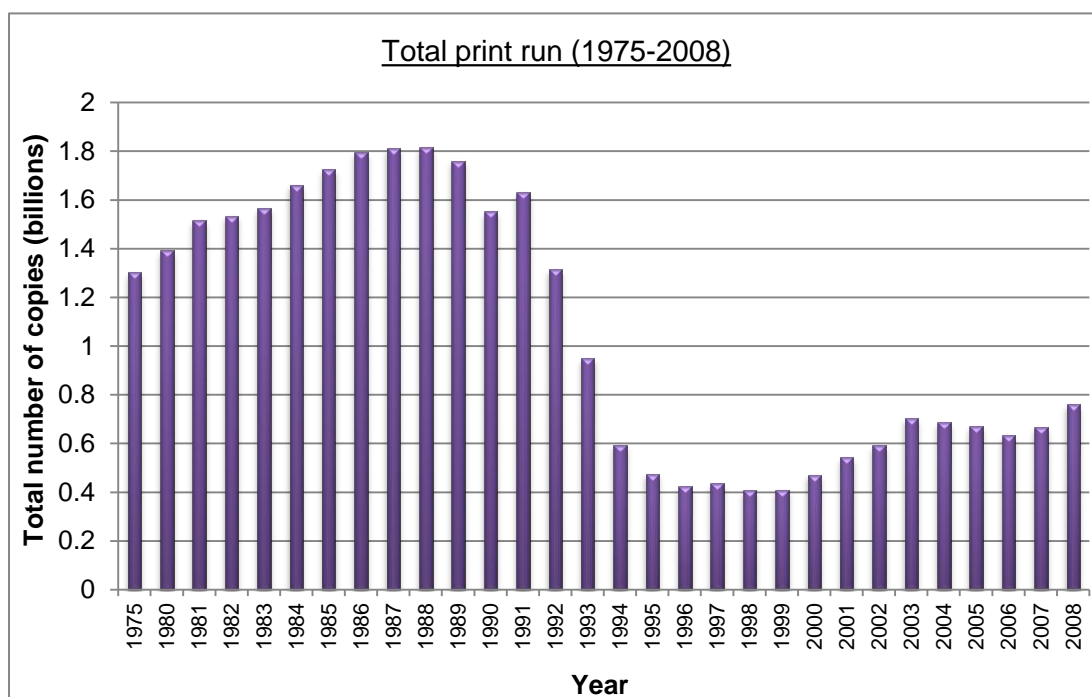


Figure 5: Total print run (1975-2008).¹⁸

The increasing number of titles and the decreasing total print run has obviously had an impact on the average print run of a single title. Throughout the 1980s, the average print run was around 30,000 copies per title. The first two years following the collapse of the USSR saw a significant increase in the average print run per title,

¹⁸ The figure for the total print run per year was compiled from the following sources: 1975, 1980-84, 1987-88 (Karaichentseva 2000); 1985, 2001 - (Menzel 2005); 1986, 1989-92 - (Kuznetsov 2006); 1993-99 - (Zassoursky 2001); 2000 - (Ogryzko 2001); 2002-03 - (Lensky 2004a); 2004-06 - (Sirozhenko 2005, 2006 and 2007); 2007-08 - (Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008 and 2009).

with a peak of almost 48,000 copies per title. Such a dramatic rise in the average print run at the beginning of the 1990s could be due to publishers printing only those titles that they knew would sell; thus they printed fewer titles, but more copies of each, thereby increasing the average number of copies per title. As discussed in the chapter on popular literature, many publishers in the early 1990s focused on producing texts by best-selling Western authors and were reluctant to take a chance on native Russian talent. Publishers produced a limited number of texts with a high print run because they were aware of the *defitsit* of certain popular genres and large print runs of one best-selling title were more cost-effective and less risky than smaller print runs of a greater number of titles. By 2007, the average number of copies per title had fallen to 6,119 copies per title, just one-eighth of the 1991 figure.

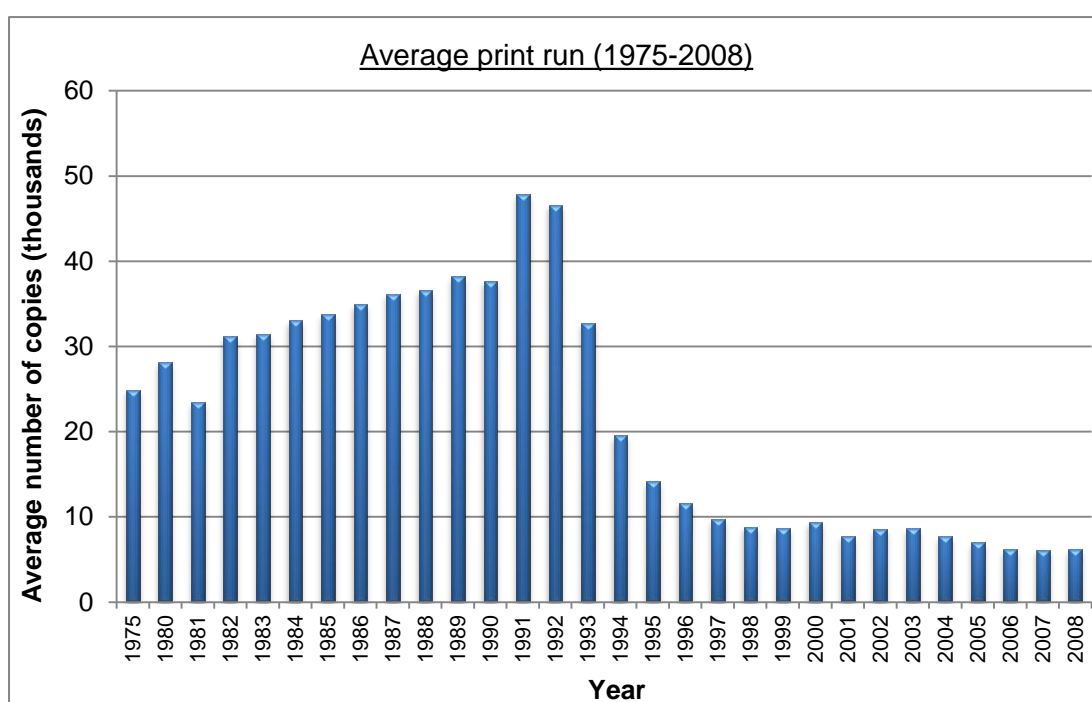


Figure 6: Average print run (1975-2008).

It could be suggested that such a low average number of copies per title may result in shortages for the reader, but because there is no longer any rigid planning, publishers are able to reprint any texts that are in demand. Equally, the decreasing average print run combined with the increasing total number of titles suggests that the book market in Russia is becoming more diverse and that publishers are able to see and exploit the commercial value of different types of literature. Such moves by publishers can be seen by examining the content of the material and in what quantity certain types of texts are published.

THE CONTENT OF POST-SOVIET LITERATURE

The print run by theme further illustrates the diversity of the material being published in post-Soviet Russia. Kuznetsov (2006, p.274) observes that book production for specific markets plays an important role in Russian publishing. As a consequence of the introduction and strengthening of the 'Law on Education' (1992) there was a sharp increase in the number of publishing houses producing textbooks (Kuznetsov 2006, p.277). In 2004, 6,321 titles with a total print run of 173.9 million copies were textbooks for use in schools, although a significant proportion was reprints and new editions (Kuznetsov 2006, p.278). When categorised by theme, education literature is consistently in third place, with political and socio-economic literature and fiction occupying first and second places respectively.

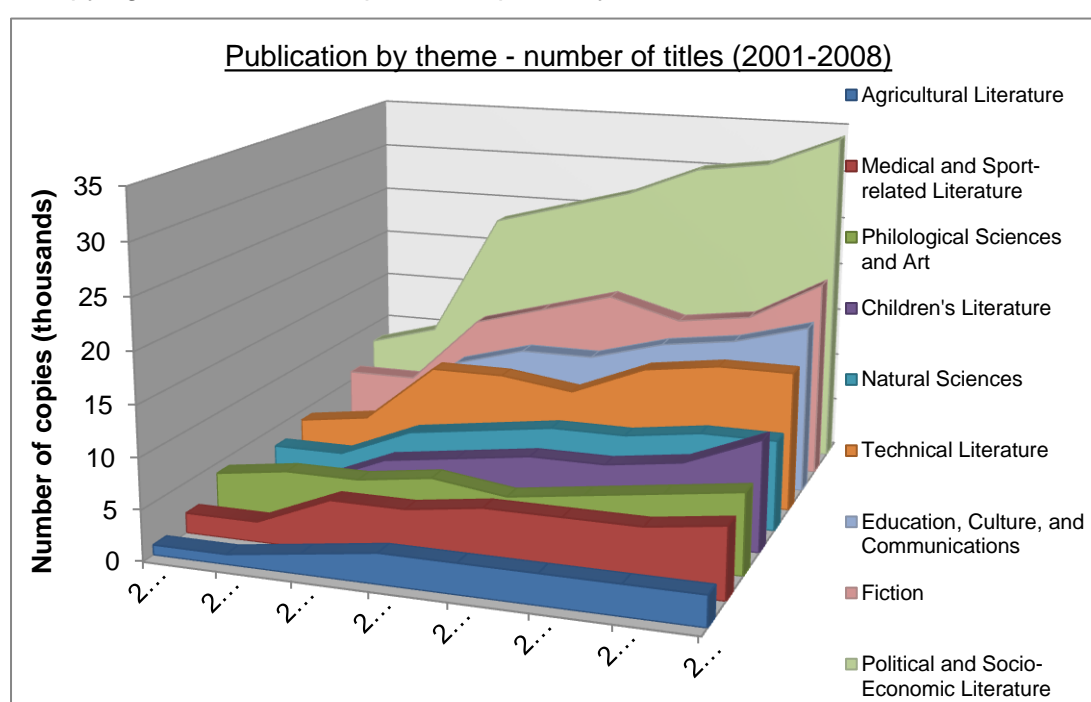


Figure 7: Publication by theme - number of titles (2001-2008).¹⁹

Yet, when considering education literature according to the total number of copies printed, around one-third of all the texts published fall into this category. Fiction occupies second place, accounting for one-fifth of the total print run, and until 2005, political and socio-economic literature lay in third place according to total copies

¹⁹ Figures compiled from the following: 2001-02 –Shitova (2002), 2003 - (Lensky 2004a), 2004-06 - (Sirozhenko 2005, 2006 and 2007); 2007-08 - (Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008 and 2009). Figures for 2001-02 are the half-yearly number of titles, so care must be taken to recognise that the increase between 2002 and 2003 is not as sharp as it appears from these figures.

printed. Since 2005, children's literature, another of the categories at which book production is specifically aimed by the political authorities, rose to third place as indicated by the total print run. Yet, by number of titles, children's literature is sixth of the nine categories defined by Russian commentators. Kuznetsov (2006) suggests that children's literature is considered 'problematic' and that there is little change in the texts that are published. In contrast, science publications, in spite of a comparatively high number of titles, have a low total print run. In 2003, 16,584 titles with a total print run of 15 million copies were published, giving an average print run of about 900 copies per title (Kuznetsov 2006, p.274). The cost of producing a scientific text is higher than the price for which it is sold.

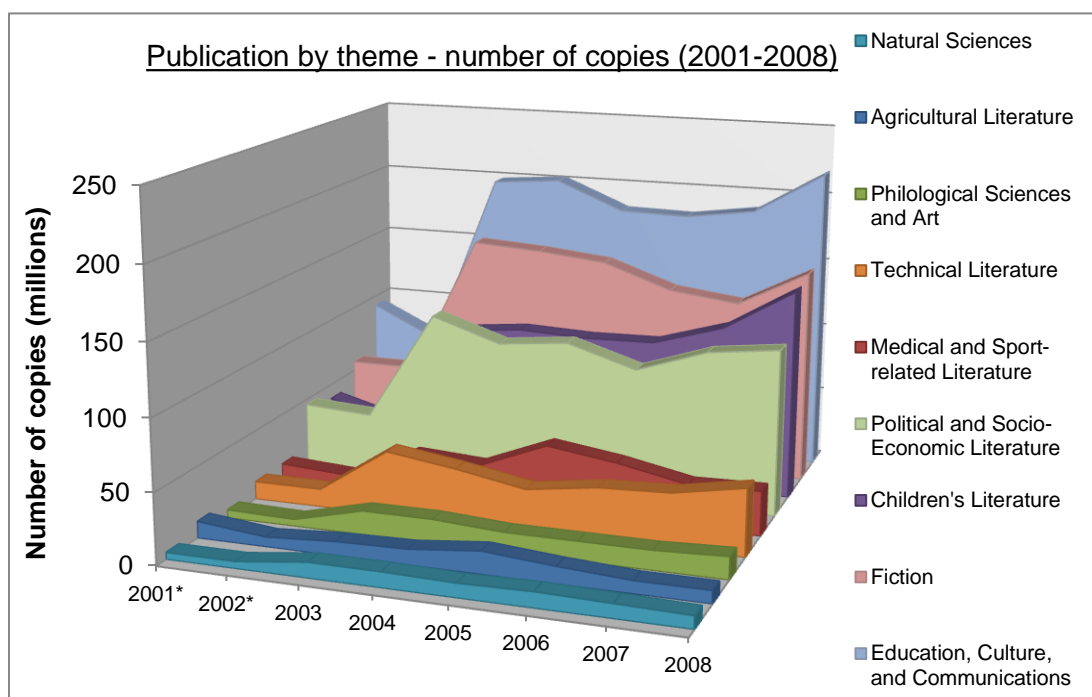


Figure 8: Publication by theme - number of copies (2001-2008).²⁰

From the figures associated with the number of titles and print run, it is possible to calculate the average print run by theme and compare it to the average overall print run. Between 2001 and 2007, three categories consistently had higher than average print runs: education literature, children's literature and fiction. In the case of education literature and children's literature, the average print run was more than

²⁰ Figures compiled from the following: 2001-02 –Shitova (2002), 2003 - (Lensky 2004a), 2004-06 - (Sirozhenko 2005, 2006 and 2007); 2007-08 - (Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008 and 2009). Figures for 2001-02 are the half-yearly number of titles, so care must be taken to recognise that the increase between 2002 and 2003 is not as sharp as it appears from these figures.

double the average print run. The average print run for fiction was slightly higher than the average overall print run. All of these texts have a mass readership and new releases are likely to appeal to a significant proportion of the reading population. Any text that is compulsory as part of the school curriculum will influence the pattern of publication.²¹

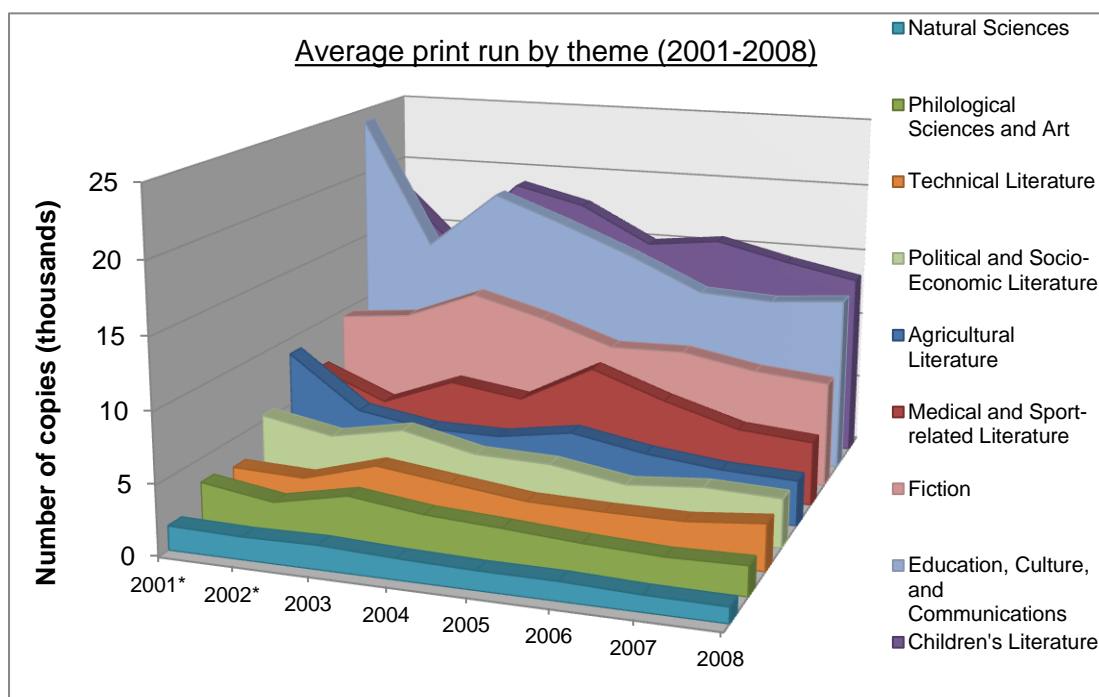


Figure 9: Average print run by theme (2001-2008).²²

Conclusions

The commercial world of literature is able to sustain a large number of publishers and publications. The diversity of the material that is being produced also demonstrates that there is a demand among readers for a wide variety of literature, not just fiction, although that category clearly plays a significant role. It is necessary to consider the requirements of the school syllabus and the impact that this has on publishing figures, both in terms of the texts that are being purchased by readers

²¹ See <http://www.school-litra.ru/> for details of the school syllabus for literature, classes 1-11 (ages 6 to 17). Authors include Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841), Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), Maksim Gorky (1868-1936), Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) and Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), among others.

²² Figures compiled from the following: 2001-02 –Shitova (2002), 2003 - (Lensky 2004a), 2004-06 - (Sirozhenko 2005, 2006 and 2007); 2007-08 - (Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008 and 2009). Figures for 2001-02 are the half-yearly number of titles, so care must be taken to recognise that the increase between 2002 and 2003 is not as sharp as it appears from these figures.

and the success of a single publisher. In spite of such factors, the influence of literature's commercial value has extended well beyond the immediate post-Soviet period and continues to be observed in the 2000s. The fact that publishers are prepared to print works which are clearly only going to be of interest to a somewhat limited number of readers demonstrates that the Soviet idea that people should all be reading the same 'improving' literature and that a big print run equated to a 'popular' text, is no longer the case. There is little doubt that publishers in the post-Soviet period have been on a steep learning curve throughout the 1990s and 2000s, yet they are now better at gauging the market. The relatively low print-runs for little-known writers have enabled them to further test reader demand: by producing just a few thousand copies, publishers are able to establish whether or not demand exists for a new author's text.

FROM THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER: THE DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION OF LITERATURE

Publishers cannot make money from the commercialisation of literature if they do not get the works that they produce to the readers and the longer a book remains on the shelf in a bookshop, the lower the profit that is made on it. As Menzel points out, 'distribution [...] has been the most fundamental problem in literary culture ever since the state-monopolised system collapsed, subsidies stopped flowing and publishing was put on the track of privatisation' (2005, p.50). Yet, publishers must not only solve the problem of getting their texts to the readers, they must also contend with the relatively new concept of persuading the reader to buy the works that they have produced, over those published by a competitor. Concerns over the distribution of books in the post-Soviet period have led to interference from several bodies which are aiming to encourage publishers to consider the wider market and to improve the distribution chain. In addition, the income of the population has an effect on their book-buying capabilities. In 2004, around 60 per cent of the population had an income of less than 3,000 roubles (£65) per month. Just 5 per cent of the population earned more than 90,000 roubles (£2,000) a month, but this group accounted for 30 per cent of the spending on books (Kuznetsov 2006, p.259). Consequently, publishers are more likely to focus their efforts in the cities, where wages tend to be higher. Arguably, the level of education that the population of a given area has achieved further influences these decisions by publishers. Kuznetsov (2006, p.259) suggests that government priorities regarding spending, the prestige associated with different types of work and the degree of government support in the region, as well as education factors, influence book distribution and production. This section will look first at the impact that the commercialisation of literature has had on the physical distribution of the book, secondly, it will examine a selection of the methods that publishers use when marketing certain types of texts and finally, it will explain the aims of programmes designed to improve distribution to the regions.

THE PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE TEXT

Karaichentseva (2000) suggests that the way in which the former state-run publishing industry was dismantled did much to damage the distribution network that had operated during the Soviet period and because state-run publishing houses were not responsible for the distribution of the texts that they produced, in the post-Soviet period they were unsure how to perform such a task and were ill-equipped to

do so. During the Soviet era, each text followed the same path from the publisher via the large wholesale trader, the wholesaler and the retail trader, before finally reaching the reader.

Kuznetsov (2006) argues that even now contemporary wholesalers are trying to get results from the ruined monopoly held by the state-run wholesale trade and that large-scale enterprises that are in the business of book distribution have not been established. In the post-Soviet period no less than eighty per cent of books are disseminated through non-government owned institutions (Kuznetsov 2006, p.29) and the methods that are used in order to get the books to the reader are as follows: the first path is direct to the consumer, either by selling directly from the publishing house or from bookshops owned by the publisher, or by postal order to those living in other regions. The second route is through retail book traders. The third path is through an authorised representative who sells to the wholesaler, retailer, or reader. The majority of publishers prefer to distribute their products through intermediaries rather than directly to the reader. It could be argued that a lack of experience among newer firms means that they prefer to bring in an intermediary rather than attempt to fulfil distribution tasks themselves. Yet the significant absence of any suitable wholesalers has prompted several of the largest private publishers to establish their own intermediary and wholesale departments. Publishers also rely heavily on the retail industry as an intermediary between themselves and the reader. Eighty-five per cent of books are sold through shops (seventy-five per cent through bookshops and ten per cent through stores whose primary goods are not books) and most sales take place in cities where the population exceeds one million residents (Kuznetsov 2006, p.260).

Such statistics suggest that there may be little incentive for publishers to find other methods for distributing their texts. Postal orders account for less than 5 per cent of the retail book trade, suggesting either that people do not order by post, or that publishers are reluctant to offer such a service. Although internet sales are starting to increase and are predicted to continue growing (Anon, personal interview 2007), with around twenty-six million internet users in Russia by 2010, the internet book business is not as developed when compared with online book selling in Western Europe and the United States. For publishers, the motivation for increasing their online sales lies in the fact that it significantly reduces the cost of selling a text by removing the intermediary. Many publishing houses at least offer details of their current catalogue online.

Yet, in spite of any difficulties that the publishing industry may have with getting its texts to the readers, the annual turnover for the publishing industry in 2003 was between 40 and 50 billion roubles. The biggest challenge for publishers once they have distributed their books is to ensure that readers buy their text and not one published by a rival. Advertising and promotion comprise another area in which the Soviet era was lacking and, perhaps unsurprisingly, both have become significantly more important for the post-Soviet publisher.

BUY OUR BOOK

Menzel suggests that it is no longer the writer who manages to produce a work that readers want to read; rather, in the post-Soviet era, it is the publisher who persuades people what to buy. PR has become a 'loan-word firmly entrenched in the Russian language [...] The *piarshchik* has become the central figure in literary life' (Menzel 2005, p.50). Book promotion in Russia follows similar rules to those used in other nations, with adverts appearing in the printed press, in catalogues and on posters, but unlike advertising of books in Britain, Russian publishers frequently use radio to promote their texts. This decision is made because of the relatively comprehensive commercial radio network that allows for significantly cheaper advertising than television. Advertisements for books on television are relatively limited. Kuznetsov (2006) suggests that one of the key reasons that publishers decide against promotion on television is due to the high cost of airtime. However, some larger publishers and book distributors pay for regular programmes entitled *Knizhnaya lavka* (*The Book Stall*), *Domashnyaya biblioteka* (*Home Library*) and *Knizhnyi mir* (*Book World*) (Kuznetsov 2006, p.229).

In addition to the active promotion of their texts, many publishers no longer 'focus their attention on individual books, but instead work to shape these books into series' (Menzel 2005, p.51). The number of publishing series rose from 220 in 1993 to 1,200 in 1997 and many publishers, both state and private, began to produce series (Il'nitsky 2003). Menzel suggests that the idea of producing a series is something new for the Russian market, yet it appears that the term 'series' is used very loosely. Many publishers' series are comprised of just a single title, which is presumably to be added to the future. To counter Menzel's claims that the series is a post-Soviet phenomenon, the practice of serialising literature was common prior to the 1917 Revolution. Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* was published in serial form between 1825 and 1832, and many of Dostoevsky's longer novels were serialised in

various literary journals and magazines. Furthermore, several Soviet publishers, including *Progress*, *Raduga*'s predecessor, published books as part of a series. For example, *Progress* created the well-known series *Mastera zarubezhnoi prozy* (*The Masters of Foreign Prose*) in the 1970s and supplemented it with the series *Sovremennaya zarubezhnaya povest* (*The Contemporary Foreign Novella*) soon after. (The implications of producing a series will be discussed later in this chapter.)

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Il'nitsky (2003) suggests that some school libraries in the provinces have not received new books since 1986/87 and that in some regions, such as Nagaybask in the Chelyabinsk oblast, there is not a single bookshop. Aware of the issues facing readers in the regions and the lack of a comprehensive distribution network, the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* and the ASKR have been trying to ensure that existing distribution links are enhanced.²³ Since 2005, the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* has been running an initiative called 'The Publications of the Regions: Accessible Information for the Country', which aims to collect a copy of each title produced. The reason for launching the scheme was to ensure that available government support is directed to the areas that need it the most. Further to this, the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* hoped such a scheme would encourage those publishers who have not been complying with the federal law concerning the *Obyazatelnyi ekzempliar* (Obligatory Free Copy) to ensure that they observe the requirements placed on them by the state (Sirozhenko 2006). The federal law on the *Obyazatelnyi ekzempliar* states that each publisher must send one copy of every title that is published to the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata*. In addition to the 'Publications of the Regions' project, the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* is attempting to solve the distribution problems by offering funding, on the proviso that publishers in the regions achieve specified targets (Sirozhenko 2006).

The ASKR has also made efforts to improve the distribution of books within Russia. In 2004, the ASKR awarded prizes to more than thirty large shops, library collections and wholesale firms as winners of the all-Russia competition for the best distribution of books (Sirozhenko 2005). In addition, the ASKR runs an annual

²³ The *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata* was founded in April 1917 by the Provisional Government. To this day, it remains the national centre of state bibliography and all publishers are required, by law, to send one copy of every title that they produce to the *Rossiiskaya knizhnaya palata*.

competition to improve the level of organisation of the book trade and to identify the best book trade enterprise.

Conclusions

In spite of the increasing numbers of publishers, titles and print runs, it could be argued that changes in the post-Soviet era have not necessarily improved accessibility to books. Although reader demand is now governing which texts publishers choose to produce – after all, they do not wish to publish works that will not sell – there has been a decline in the average print run, which could make a single title harder to obtain and the total print run is nowhere near that of the Soviet period. As illustrated by Il'nitsky (2003), in 2000, around 470 million books were published, which equates to almost three and a half books per person, or seven books per family. In 1998, there were fewer than three books per person. This is compared with 1991, when there were around ten books per person (Kuznetsov 2006, p.259), suggesting that there may be something of a shortage once again.²⁴ However, in the post-Soviet period a variety of different leisure pursuits have emerged, giving people alternative pastimes to that of reading and causing a reduction in the demand for books. Yet, in contrast to the Soviet era, if a publishing house discovers it has a bestseller on its hands it can be reprinted easily and there are no consequences, unlike in the Soviet era when a reprint would have meant deviating from the plan.

It could be suggested that in some instances publishers simply do not attempt to sell their texts in certain regions because it is not in their financial interest to do so and that one of the negative aspects of the commercialisation of literature is that even in the post-Soviet era, ghosts of the Soviet 'book hunger' remain.

²⁴ A figure echoed by Lensky, 'Itogi knigoizdaniya v 2003 godu' (2004a): 'In 2003 there were almost five books per head of the population' and by Kuznetsov, *Ekonomika i organizatsiya izdatelskoi deyatel'nosti* (2006) that in 2004, there was just under five books per person. According to Il'nitsky, 'Knigoizdanie sovremennoi Rossii' (2000), in developed countries, this figure is usually around fifteen books per person per year.

RETAINING A HOLD OVER PUBLISHING? THE FEDERAL STATE PROGRAMMES FOR THE SUPPORT OF PUBLISHING IN RUSSIA

According to some, Russian publishers continue to be wary of publishing anything that could be viewed as a criticism of the government (Nurnberg 2008), while others believe that the book is currently the only free medium in Russia (Anon 2008). Such assertions are rejected by Vladimir Grigoriev (2008), Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications, who believes that no publisher is pressurised by the state. Clearly, the question over state policy on publishing and intervention in the book market means that 'without taking into account [the state's] influence, the picture of book publishing in the 1990s and early 2000s would be incomplete' (Kuznetsov 2006, p.33). This section of Chapter One will look at the idea that literature continues to be used as a tool by the state to influence the population.

THE REASONS FOR STATE SUPPORT

State support was requested, and granted, as early as August 1992, although official state support has only been in existence since 1996 when the *Special Federal Programme* 'The Support of State Printing and Book Publishing in Russia 1996-2001' (Government of the Russian Federation 1995) was adopted. Although the programme specifies the support of state publishing enterprises, the assistance was in fact available to any publisher. Such support was necessary, in part, because of the commercialisation of literature and the main aims of the publishing industry becoming focused on making a profit. The key goals of the state programme were to ensure that various socially significant themes would be covered and that such State support 'enabled books that might not have otherwise seen the light of day to be published' (Kuznetsov 2006, p.34). In addition, the need for support was greater in the publishing industry than in other newly privatised industries because of the initial capital investment that was needed before any text could be produced.

'THE SUPPORT OF STATE PRINTING AND BOOK PUBLISHING IN RUSSIA' 1996-2001 AND 2002-2005

The chief goal of the 1996-2001 programme officially stated the extent to which the constitutional rights of the Russian population were met in terms of obtaining and disseminating information and to 'gaining access to cultural values', but also the 'political stability of Russian society and its artistic, scientific and cultural potential'

(Government of the Russian Federation 1995). Such a statement clearly raises questions: what are 'cultural values'; what constitutes 'political stability'; and who decides the answers to these questions?

The *Special Federal Programme* outlined eleven areas that were considered a priority in 1995 (Government of the Russian Federation 1995). Broadly speaking, they included the following: textbooks and methodological texts for all levels of education; scientific literature (technical and popular); educational, cognitive and reference material for children and teenagers; practical literature; fiction (including collections of 'the classics'); reference books and encyclopaedias; works in the languages of Russian minorities; texts associated with significant events in the history or culture of Russia; publications on ecology; texts aimed at improving people's self-consciousness, patriotism and spiritual culture; and texts which form the 'last word' in the art of Russian book publishing.

However, the role of the *Special Federal Programme* was not just to ensure that socially significant texts were published. The entire system required significant sums of money for investment. One of the first tasks to be undertaken was the refurbishment and re-equipment of the three large printing plants in Smolensk, Tver and Saratov, which would subsequently be in a position to produce the entire print run of Russian school textbooks, a move that represented a saving of eighty million German marks because it would no longer be necessary to outsource the work to foreign printing presses (Government of the Russian Federation 1995). In addition to spending on new equipment, the *Special Federal Programme* noted that elements belonging to the old Soviet system continued to affect the new publishing industry. Problems arose in 1995 with the supplies of paper in terms of the variety and the quantity that were available. The cost had become comparable with foreign imports, but the quality was lower. Former monopolies in the production of printing ink also had an impact on the publishing industry. Just two factories, the Torzhok factory in Tver and the Moscow Paint factory, were operating in the Russian printing ink market in 1995. Their combined output was 46,500 tonnes of ink. By 2005, the demand for ink was predicted to be 50,000 tonnes, an amount that could not be produced by these two factories alone.

The investment in industries providing a service to the publishing industry was outlined as vital for the success of the 1996-2001 project. The factories producing printing plates required a short-term investment of five billion roubles in order to

prevent the shutdown of the factory which would have resulted in the suspension of publishing in twenty regions of Russia. The *Special Federal Programme* outlined a variety of other industrial sectors on which the publishing industry relied in 1995 and whose instabilities caused varying degrees of vulnerability for the publishing industry and its output.

The aim of the 1996-2001 programme was to completely overhaul every aspect of the publishing industry and attempt to solve the problems left behind by the Soviet period. The funding provided by the *Special Federal Programme* was not simply to be used for propping up a fragile industry, but was concerned with disentangling the old Soviet system in which every industry was ensnared, and ensuring that publishers were not dependent on a single factory for their supply of paper, or consignment of ink. As illustrated, the aims of the 1996-2001 programme were numerous and costly. Arguably, five years were not sufficient for achieving all the aspects detailed in the original plan, particularly when coupled with the financial difficulties that Russia experienced in 1998. Consequently, the *Special Federal Programme* for 'The Support of State Printing and Book Publishing in Russia from 2002-2005' was adopted in December 2001 (Government of the Russian Federation 2001). The 2002-2005 programme was essentially a continuation of its predecessor, with the brief reassertion of the main aims of the 1996-2001 programme at the beginning, followed by an outline of where the funding for the 2002-2005 programme was to come from and on what types of publications it was to be spent. Once again, the emphasis of the programme was to ensure the realisation of the constitutional right of Russian citizens in respect of obtaining and disseminating printed materials and to guarantee the diversity of the nation's publishing portfolio.

2006: THE END OF A DECADE OF SUPPORT?

It seems that one of the chief aims of the 1996-2001 programme has been achieved: that the publishing and printing industry would be in a position to support itself. The previous *Special Federal Programmes* have comprised part of the *Kultura Rossii* programme implemented by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation. In its most recent programme for the period 2006-2010, there is no mention of a specific programme supporting the printing and book publishing industry. However, since the end of the 2002-2005 programme, the total print run has fluctuated slightly, falling in 2006, arguably because of the conclusion of the *Special Federal Programme*, but rising again in 2007. It will be interesting to note whether the state will re-introduce support should the publishing industry renew its

1996 request for help, or whether the state will allow market forces to govern the post-Soviet publishing industry. In addition, the removal of state support will undoubtedly cause smaller publishing houses to go out of business because they are in even less of a position to compete with larger publishers, raising questions over whether a new kind of monopoly will emerge in post-2006 Russia.

As part of the *Kultura Rossii* 2006-2010 programme, the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications will give funding for some publications. There is an open competition and entries are judged by a panel of experts made up of 'academics, cultural experts, famous writers and representatives from the Ministry of Culture, *Rospechat* and *Minobrnauka*' (Government of the Russian Federation 2006).²⁵ There are various conditions that must be fulfilled, for example, the money will finance between one thousand and five thousand copies and priority will be given to the following types of text: literature with a civil interest theme; literature for children or young people; reference books or encyclopaedias; fiction;²⁶ literature about culture and art; educational and cognitive material, scientific and technical literature; literature from the republics and autonomous regions; literature concerned with significant dates in Russian history.²⁷ The full results of successful tenders will be available from the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications. Conclusions regarding the extent to which this is a genuine attempt by the state to support the publishing industry and to ensure that the texts which may not be commercially viable, but are of importance to the Russian people, are still published, can only be tentative. Given the nature of state involvement in the publishing

²⁵ There is no further indication of who these experts may be and no details concerning the qualifications required to be involved in evaluating the applications for funding.

²⁶ See the Government of the Russian Federation, 'O konkursnom otbore izdaniy v federalnuyu programmuy "Kultura Rossii" na 2006 god' (2006, 'On the competitive selection of publications in the *Special Federal Programme* "Culture of Russia" for 2006'). The *Kultura Rossii* 2006-2010 programme states that 'fictional texts should comment on and be reinforced with serious references to the domestic classics, which form the broad ideas about Russian cultural heritage and the work of contemporary authors should demonstrate high literary craftsmanship, asserting state, national and humanitarian values. The works of foreign authors [may qualify if they] occupy a worthy place in a world-wide cultural context and demonstrate the high level of Russian translation'.

²⁷ See the Government of the Russian Federation, 'O konkursnom otbore izdaniy v federalnuyu programmuy "Kultura Rossii" na 2006 god' (2006), which offers (brief) additional details of the types of texts that are covered by these headings.

industry prior to 1991, it is impossible not to question the reasons for state support in the post-Soviet context. Only after the results of the entire 2006-2010 competition are known can judgements be made concerning the motivation for state support.

Conclusions

Kuznetsov (2006) argues that state support for publishing was in fact minimal and that it was relevant only to those texts that might not have otherwise been published. He suggests that publishers did not receive the benefit of the *Special Federal Programme*, but books themselves were subsidised. Both textbooks and children's books are produced in large volumes, with print runs that are well above the national average, thereby fulfilling one of the chief aims of the *Special Federal Programmes*. Other areas that were outlined as vulnerable by the federal state programmes, such as scientific literature, have maintained a steady number of titles. Although the print run for each title is relatively low, the number of titles published has answered the requirements of the *Special Federal Programmes*.

In spite of fears that publishers may try to avoid printing texts that could offer an unfavourable picture of the government, there is little evidence to suggest that a publisher who did would be risking financial loss based on these *Special Federal Programmes*. In addition, the grounds on which these concerns were founded are not specific to Russia. The tax relief offered to Russian publishers (VAT at ten per cent rather than eighteen per cent) is not uncommon. In the UK, books are VAT free, and many other Western countries replicate the situation in Russia by reducing the VAT payable on printed material. It seems that without the *Special Federal Programmes*, publishers would have been less inclined to produce material not targeted at a mass readership and guaranteeing a substantial return. In addition, those wishing to buy certain specialist texts would not only have found them more difficult to obtain, but would have paid a significantly higher price for them. Thanks to the *Special Federal Programme*, which aimed to subsidise the cost of specialist literature, consumers were able to afford them and publishers were less concerned about receiving a return on their investment.

IS THE COMMERCIALISATION OF LITERATURE THE 'NORMALISATION' OF LITERATURE?

In 2004, it was suggested that Russia was becoming the successor of the Soviet Union as the 'largest publishing power on the planet' and that the 2003 figure of 80,000 titles could be used as a launch pad for future growth with the aim of reaching the 100,000 titles mark (Lensky 2004a). Other commentators have observed that the growth in the number of titles since the early 1990s has been marked and they have taken this growth to illustrate Russia's reassertion of its power on the world publishing scene (Sirozhenko 2005). Such statements, and the figures surrounding Russia's publishing output may very well be interesting, but they are somewhat abstract. This section will briefly examine the commercialisation of literature on the Russian scene and offer comparisons with the same industry in different parts of the world.

In 1977, the 'First International Book Fair' was held in Moscow and it was seen as a signal by the rest of the world that 'the Russians were ready to do business' (Walker cited in Kuznetsov 2006, p.19), but to what extent is the post-Soviet publishing industry really in a position to compete with its nearest rivals in world publishing? Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, after the days of huge print runs and large numbers of titles printed, the Russian publishing industry felt a sense of failure when, in 1991, it produced a mere 34,050 titles.

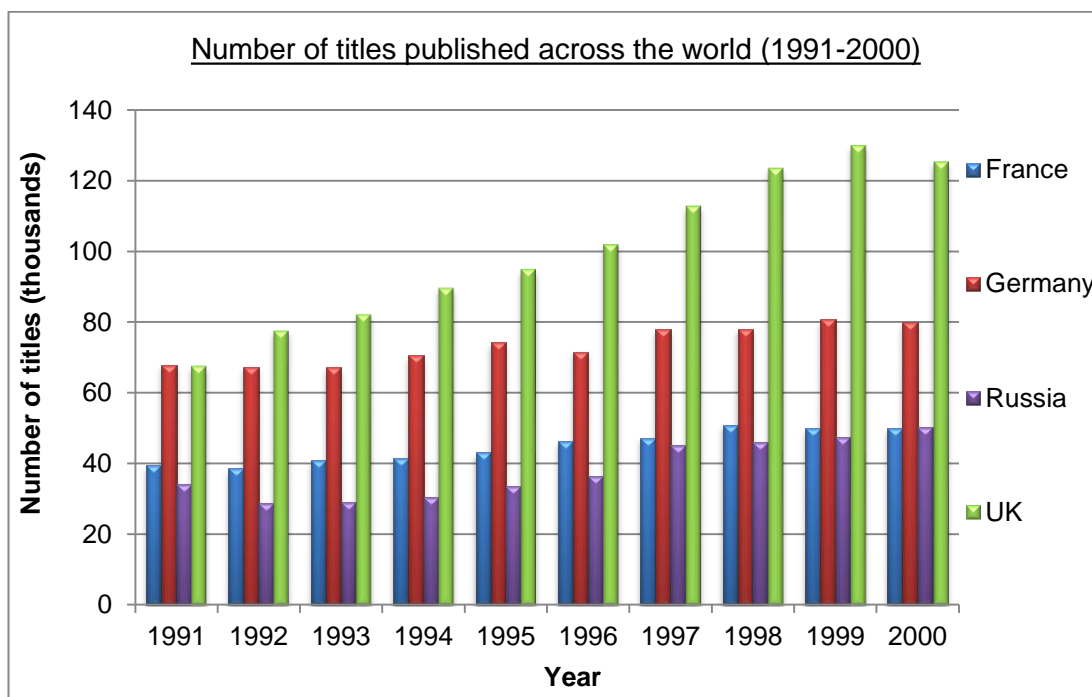


Figure 10: Number of titles published across the world (1991-2000) (International Publishers' Association 2001).

Yet, when compared with other Western European nations this figure was not so low. In 1991, with 34,050 titles published, Russia was producing a fraction fewer titles than France, which produced 39,492 titles. With the exception of 1992, Russia consistently demonstrated a year-on-year increase of between two and twenty per cent in the number of titles published and by 2000 was producing as many titles as were published in France.

Although Russia was still somewhat behind the United Kingdom in terms of number of titles printed in 2000, printing 50,085 titles compared with 125,000 titles in the UK, by 2008, the gap between the numbers of titles published in the two nations had lessened considerably. Russia published 123,000 titles compared with the United Kingdom, which produced 130,000 titles.²⁸

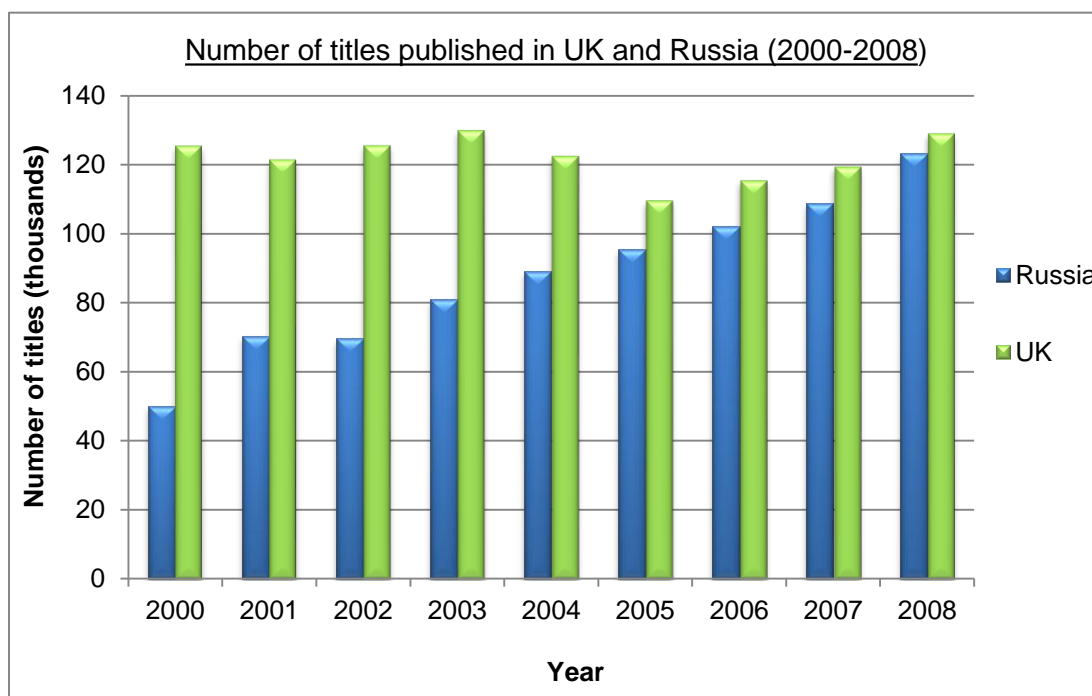


Figure 11: Number of titles published in the UK and Russia (2000-2008) (Nielsen Bookdata 2008.)

However, it seems that Russia is pursuing China's title as the most prolific publishing nation in the world. In 2006, after Russia managed to break the 100,000

²⁸ UK Trade and Investment suggests that the success of the UK publishing industry is 'driven by its well-established network of overseas partners and the dominance of the English language. The UK is the world's largest exporter and re-exporter of books by value, with almost a half of the UK book publishing industry's revenue generated by export sales, which are worth over £1 billion a year' (2010, p.4).

titles mark, Sirozhenko's comment on reaching the figure was to highlight the fact that China had produced more than 210,000 titles in the same year. Arguably, Russia has forgotten the history of its own planned economy, failing to remember that just because a title is published does not mean that it is being read.

In spite of the apparent comparability between the Russian publishing industry and that of other nations, it appears that, once again, distribution issues are a problem. Even the largest bookshops in Moscow and St Petersburg carry significantly fewer titles at any one time when compared with their Western counterparts. The average bookshop in France carries between 200,000 and 250,000 titles, whereas *Biblio-Globus* in Moscow has only 70,000 titles at any one time (Kuznetsov 2006, p.269). Arguably, the relative lack of solvency of publishers and bookshops means that they cannot afford to have a large number of titles on the shelves waiting to be sold – the longer a book remains unsold, the lower the profit.

Although Russian commentators appear to be content simply to measure the number of titles produced in Russia against the numbers published in other countries, this does not provide a complete picture of the impact that the commercialisation of literature has had on the publishing industry. No comment has been made about the total print run in Russia in comparison with the other top publishing nations. This may be because such data are relatively hard to find, but it may be that Russia is behind in terms of total print run, and this is not a fact to which commentators wish to draw attention. In addition, the absence of such figures makes it more difficult to offer a comprehensive assessment of the position of Russia on the world publishing scene. Even though Russia may be producing a similar number of titles to the United Kingdom, the populations of these nations are quite different, thus the number of books per head of the population in Russia is substantially lower than that of the UK. Regardless of the lack of data with which to provide a complete picture, the commercialisation of literature has contributed to the development of publishing in Russia and has allowed commentators to make legitimate comparisons between the position of literature and its publication in Russia and other publishing nations.

If commercialisation does represent the 'normalisation' of literature, then it seems that Russia still has some way to go. Although the number of titles that Russia produces may be comparable with other Western nations, the access that the

population has to books is not yet at the same level. Even in the largest cities bookshops are stocked less comprehensively than their Western counterparts. The number of book per head of the population also remains relatively low, in comparison with countries such as the UK and also in comparison with the Soviet era. However, by simply looking at the figures, any assessment of 'normalisation' fails to take into consideration the extent to which diversity has increased. Compared with the Soviet period, access to different types of books has undoubtedly gone up – the Soviet-era shortages are no more. Although the number of books per person has fallen in recent years this is likely to be because print runs are no longer as high as they were in the 1980s rather than due to a decline in titles published. Perhaps it is fair to suggest that the commercialisation of literature has been something of a 'normalisation' of literature when comparing the post-Soviet period with the Soviet era. Evaluating the extent of Russia's 'normalised' publishing industry in the context of Western experiences may prove interesting, but does not necessarily provide a complete picture.

THE EXPERIENCES OF *EKSMO*, *RADUGA* AND *FENIKS*

From 1991, the Russian publishing industry has enjoyed various successes and has successfully marketed books as a commodity that is most definitely available to buy and sell alongside other household products. The diversity of the material produced has changed dramatically since the early 1990s and state restrictions on the content appear to have ceased. The purpose of this section is to explore whether the trends that have occurred on a national scale are being replicated at a smaller, individual publisher level. Three publishers will be used as case studies to demonstrate the way in which the role of literature has shifted to being the object of commercial enterprise and will examine the extent to which the state continues to control literary output. These publishers are *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks*. *Eksmo* was founded in Moscow in 1991 and continues to be privately owned. *Raduga* remains under state control since its creation in 1982 and is located in Moscow. *Feniks* is a privately owned, post-Soviet publisher, based in Rostov-on-Don. (It was not possible to find a state-controlled publisher in the provinces that produced these types of text.) Each of these three publishers has regularly featured in the top ten for number of titles and number of copies produced during the 2000s. All three publishers produce a range of texts, with a particular focus on literary fiction.

EKSMO: A MOSCOW-BASED, PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLISHING HOUSE

Established in 1991 as a book trading enterprise, *Eksmo* began producing works of detective fiction, contemporary prose, popular science and children's literature as well as Russian and foreign fantasy, business and training literature, books on cookery, health, fitness and sport. The journal *Knizhnyi biznes* (*The Book Business*) has repeatedly awarded *Eksmo* the 'No.1 Publisher' title and Karaichentseva (2000) suggests the publishing house has been one of 'the most dynamically developed in Russia' throughout the 1990s.

Eksmo's commercial success cannot be underestimated and its website claims that every seventh reader in Russia has heard of detective novels by Darya Dontsova (1952-) and Aleksandra Marinina (1957-), prose by Tatyana Tolstaya (1951-) and Lyudmila Ulitskaya (1943-) and science fiction by Vasily Golovachev (1948-) and Nik Perumov (1963-) (*Eksmo* 2004a). Yet in spite of the publisher's pride in the level of market penetration that its books have achieved, *Eksmo* states that its main objective is to make contemporary Russian literature available to the whole world (*Eksmo* 2004a). In addition, the publisher hopes to increase interest in reading and

sees it as an important factor in the development of national culture, tradition and the intellectual potential of the country (*Eksmo* 2004b). Arguably, the commercialisation of literature and the profits that a successful publishing house enjoys enable idealistic notions to reappear on the publishing industry's agenda. Of course, such a programme could also be viewed as somewhat nationalistic in its aims.

RADUGA: A MOSCOW-BASED STATE-RUN PUBLISHER

Raduga was created in 1982 by editorial staff of *Progress* publishing house and focused on producing works of fiction, the history of literature and linguistics, the study of art and foreign language textbooks. In the 1980s, *Raduga's* main aims were the publication of foreign authors translated into Russian and the translation of native authors into other languages, which was linked to the enormous attention that the Soviet Union paid to works printed in foreign languages as part of its propaganda campaign. Karaichentseva (2000) points out that ideological consideration governed the texts that were translated both from and into Russian, presenting *Raduga* with a challenging task. The pride of the publishing house in the post-Soviet era is the *bilingvy*, which are texts aimed at students of foreign languages which include the text in its original language and in translation, with a commentary providing additional detail (*Raduga* [n.d.]a).

However, much of *Raduga's* success since the early 1990s has been due to a partnership with international publisher *Harlequin* which led to the publication in 1992 of one of the first large series of mass literature in Russian – the *Lyubovnyi roman* (*The love story*) series. As a result, *Raduga* is one of the leading publishers of romantic fiction (*Raduga* [n.d.]a). The success of the *Lyubovnyi roman* series meant that in the second half of the 1990s, *Raduga* was able to continue publishing works that were not associated with the mass genres, again emphasising the continued ideological stance of post-Soviet publishers that a proportion of the works they produce should contribute to the 'advancement' of the Russian readership.

FENIKS: A PRIVATELY-OWNED PUBLISHER LOCATED IN ROSTOV-ON-DON

Privately owned publisher *Feniks* located in Rostov-on-Don was founded in 1990, at the very end of the Soviet period, and is now a publisher and stationery producer. *Feniks* is one of the few regional publishers to feature in the list of the top publishers in Russia, although its position among the top producing publishers is not as safe as

those Moscow-based publishers which are responsible for a large proportion of the print run. The position of regional publishers is eagerly followed by commentators who are aware of the Moscow-centric nature of publishing in Russia. Sirozhenko (2007) makes particular mention of *Feniks* and its non-appearance among the top publishers in 2006. He observes that *Feniks* featured at number seven in the 'top ten' list in 2005 with 829 titles, but failed to reach the top ten in 2006. By 2007, *Feniks* had regained its position among the top publishers in Russia and its future plans for book distribution suggest that it is in a relatively strong financial position.

PUBLISHING OUTPUT: THE CASE STUDIES

The post-Soviet publishing industry has enjoyed a significant degree of success, illustrated by an increasing number of titles and total print run. The falling average print run suggests that there has been an increase in the diversity of material printed and does not necessarily indicate a shortage of material, because publishers are now at liberty to reprint any texts that have been particularly popular. Yet, there are variations in the output of individual publishers, which are created by the differences in their ownership and their location.

The number of titles on a national level has increased, with the 105,000 titles mark passed in 2007. Since *Eksmo's* transition from book distribution business to fully-fledged publisher in 1993, the number of titles that it has released has demonstrated a general upward trend. In spite of small decreases in 2003, and again in 2006, *Eksmo* has seen sustained growth from thirty-one titles in 1994 to more than 4,000 in 2007. Although producing far fewer titles than *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks* have also witnessed an upward trend in the number of titles that they have issued since the early 1990s. In spite of international collaboration with *Harlequin*, *Raduga*, the state-owned publisher, has consistently produced the fewest titles since 1999, averaging one-third of the titles published by *Feniks* and just one-twentieth of the total released by *Eksmo*.

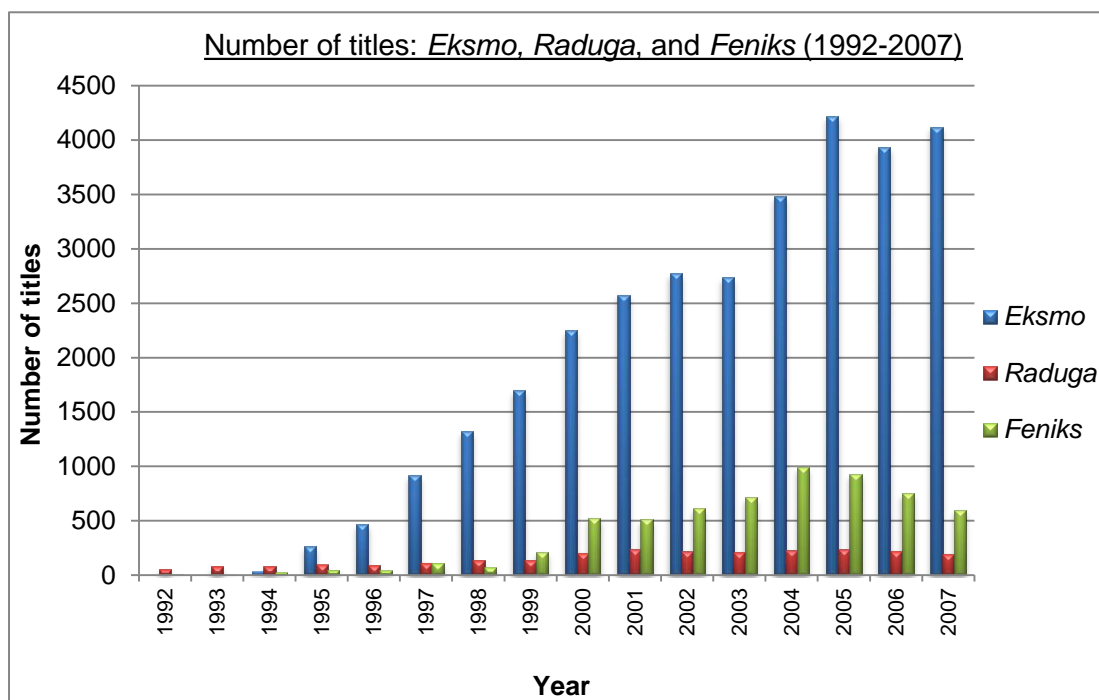


Figure 12: Number of titles: *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks* (1992-2007).

It is worth noting that neither Moscow-based publisher experienced a decline in the number of titles produced in 1998 because of the financial crisis, demonstrating a contrast with the provincial publisher, *Feniks*, which reported a decrease of more than thirty per cent in the number of titles issued in 1998. The number of titles released by *Raduga* peaked at 233 in 2004. *Eksmo* and *Feniks* reported increases in the number of titles published until 2005, but both companies saw a drop in 2006. The end of the 2002-2005 state support programme may have had some impact on publishing production in 2006 and resulted in the decrease in the total number of titles published. Only *Eksmo* has managed to reverse the decline in the number of titles published in 2007.

Eksmo has also demonstrated considerable success when considering the total number of books printed. Unsurprisingly, in 1993, its first year of operation as a publishing house, it produced significantly fewer texts than *Raduga*, a state publisher with prior experience of the industry. By 1995, *Eksmo* had surpassed the number of titles produced by *Raduga* and continues to outstrip them by a figure of more than four to one. *Feniks* has consistently produced fewer copies than either of the Moscow-based publishers. Arguably, the lower print run of the provincial publisher is due to a lower population density and consequently a lower demand for texts.

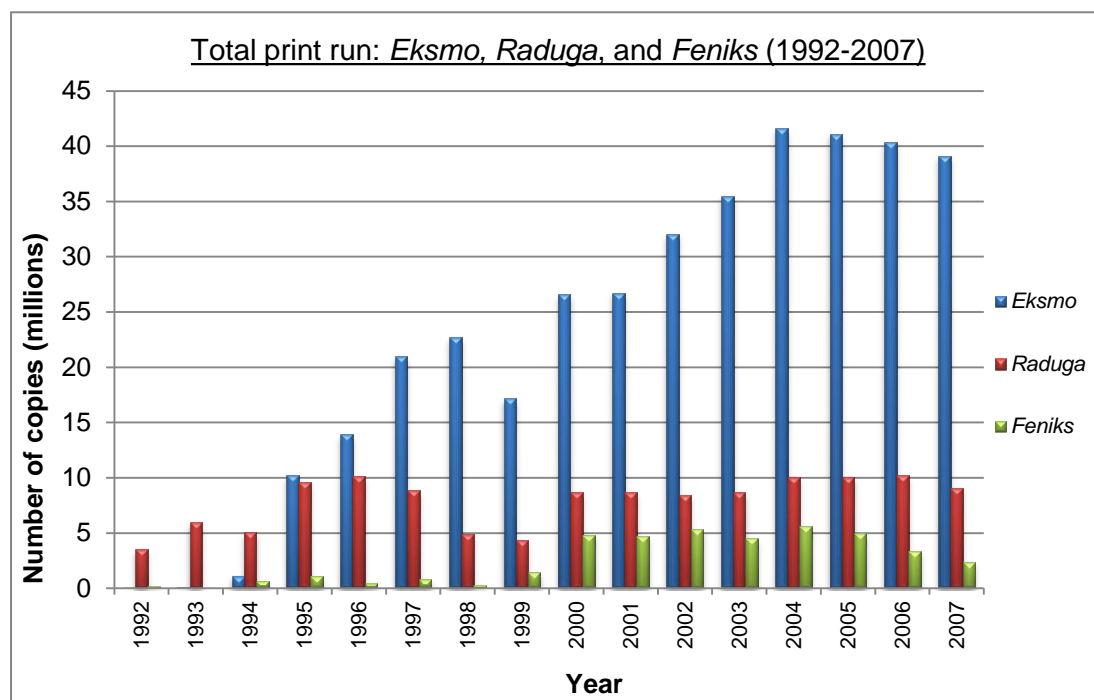


Figure 13: Total print run: *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks* (1992-2007).

Perhaps it is also unsurprising that *Feniks* witnessed a significant drop in its total print run in 1998, to 25,700 copies, a decrease of more than two-thirds of its 1997 print run. Yet in contrast to both Moscow-based publishers, *Feniks* enjoyed a notable increase in its total print run for 1999. Arguably, the reasons for both *Raduga's* and *Eksmo's* drop in total copies printed in 1999 may have been due to the time of year that the crisis occurred. As the default took place well into the second half of 1998, it is possible that *Raduga* and *Eksmo* had already printed a substantial proportion of their total print run in the first six months of the year. Although they may have reduced their print runs for texts published in the remaining months of 1998, their overall print run total was not noticeably affected until 1999, when the consequences of the crisis encouraged publishers to print as many titles as before, just in smaller numbers.

The impact of the financial crisis and the effect that it had on *Eksmo's* print run are illustrated by the notable increase in 1999 of the percentage of texts printed in the two lowest print-run bands, the 'up to 5,000 copies' and 'up to 10,000 copies' print-run bands. The number of texts released with a print run of 'up to 5,000 copies' increased from less than 0.1 per cent in 1998, to more than two per cent in 1999, and the number of texts issued with a print run of 'up to 10,000 copies' rose from ten per cent, to more than twenty-five per cent. Although more than sixty per cent of

texts in 1999 were still published with a print run of ‘up to 50,000 copies’, this figure represented a drop from seventy-four per cent in 1998.

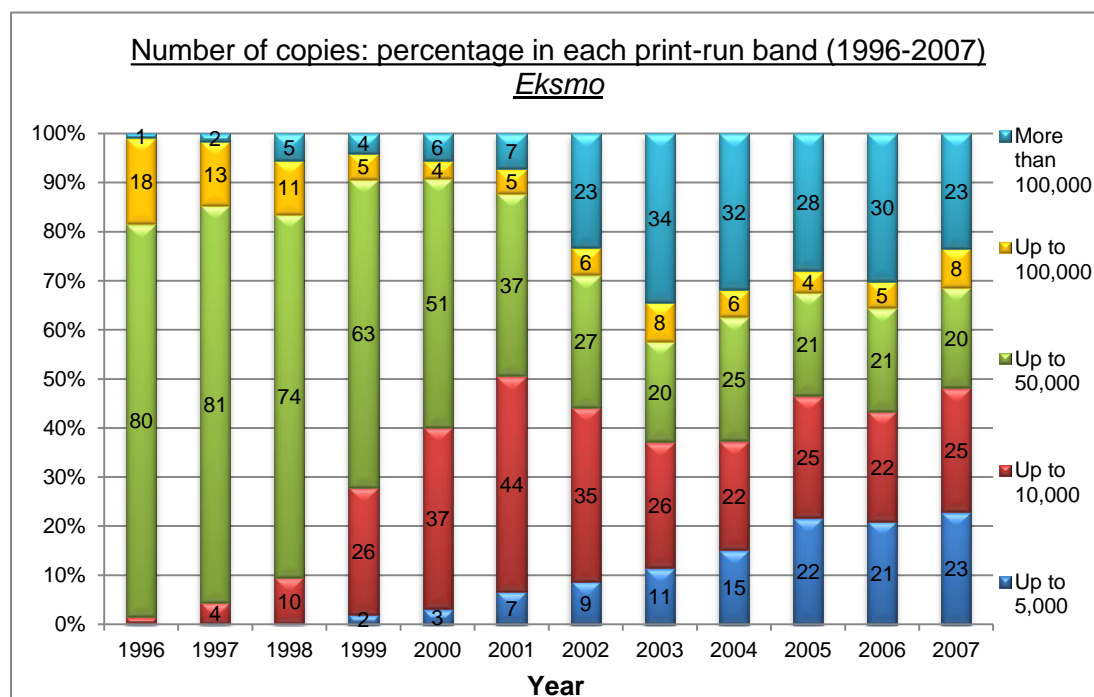


Figure 14: Number of copies: percentage in each print-run band (1996-2007) *Eksmo*.²⁹

The percentage of copies in the print-run bands of ‘up to 100,000 copies’ and ‘more than 100,000 copies’ decreased in 1999 when compared with the 1998 figures. What is interesting to note is that from 2003, the percentage of copies in the print-run bands of ‘up to 10,000 copies’ and ‘up to 50,000 copies’ have fluctuated very little. This may be because *Eksmo* is more confident in predicting which texts will sell in what quantities and that they are prepared to reprint if necessary.

In contrast to *Eksmo*, *Raduga* reported a higher percentage of texts in the print-run band of ‘up to 100,000 copies’ in 1999 than in 1998, although in all the other print-run bands *Raduga*’s print run followed a similar pattern to that of *Eksmo*. The percentage of copies in the ‘up to 50,000 copies’ print run fell from more than twenty-five per cent in 1998 to sixteen per cent in 1999 and the percentage of copies printed in the bands ‘up to 5,000 copies’ and ‘up to 10,000 copies’ all witnessed increases in 1999. The texts with a print run of ‘up to 100,000 copies’ in

²⁹ Percentages do not add up to 100 because the data for those texts printed in ‘up to 500 copies’ and ‘up to 1,000 copies’ is not included here. This is because the numbers are negligible.

1999 were all novels translated from English and appear to be of the romantic genre. *Raduga* asserts that the success of its romantic series allows other, less commercially popular texts to be printed. Therefore an increase in the percentage of titles in the romantic series presumably helped to ensure that *Raduga* was able to weather the financial crisis and the increase in the percentage of copies in the print-run bands of 'up to 10,000 copies' between 1998 and 2003 further illustrates attempts to reduce output and costs in the less profitable areas of the publishing house.

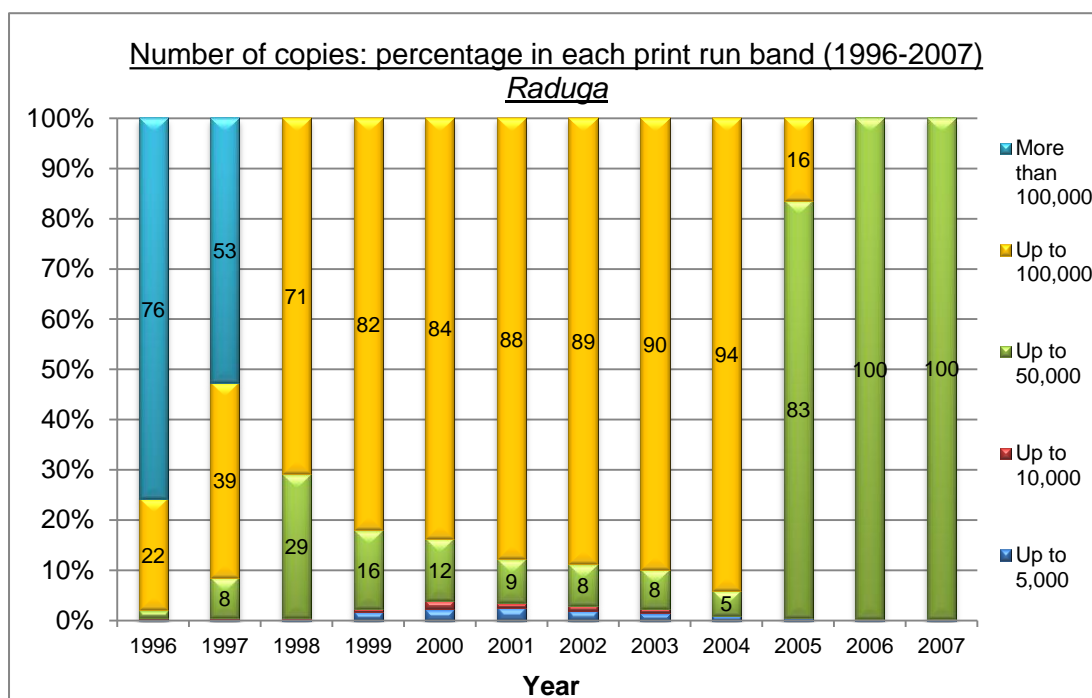


Figure 15: Number of copies: percentage in each print run band (1992-2007) *Raduga*.³⁰

Just as the total number of titles printed has seen fluctuations in recent years, so too have the total print runs of all three publishers. Once again, these changes coincide with the end of the 2002-2005 state support programme. Should this downward trend continue, and particularly if it has been caused by the withdrawal of state support, it will be interesting to observe whether the changes to state funding under the *Kultura Rossii 2006-2010* programme are reversed.

³⁰ Percentages do not add up to 100 because the data for those texts printed in the 'up to 500 copies' and 'up to 1,000 copies' is not included here. This is because the numbers are negligible.

The average print run further illustrates that *Eksmo* and *Raduga* published fewer copies on average in 1999 than in 1998. The average print runs for private publishers *Eksmo* and *Feniks* have followed a similar pattern to the national average print run, demonstrating a general downward trend throughout the latter part of the 1990s and a levelling off in the 2000s with the occasional peak, such as that of 2003, which has been attributed to the confirmation of continuing state support from 2002 (Lensky 2004a).

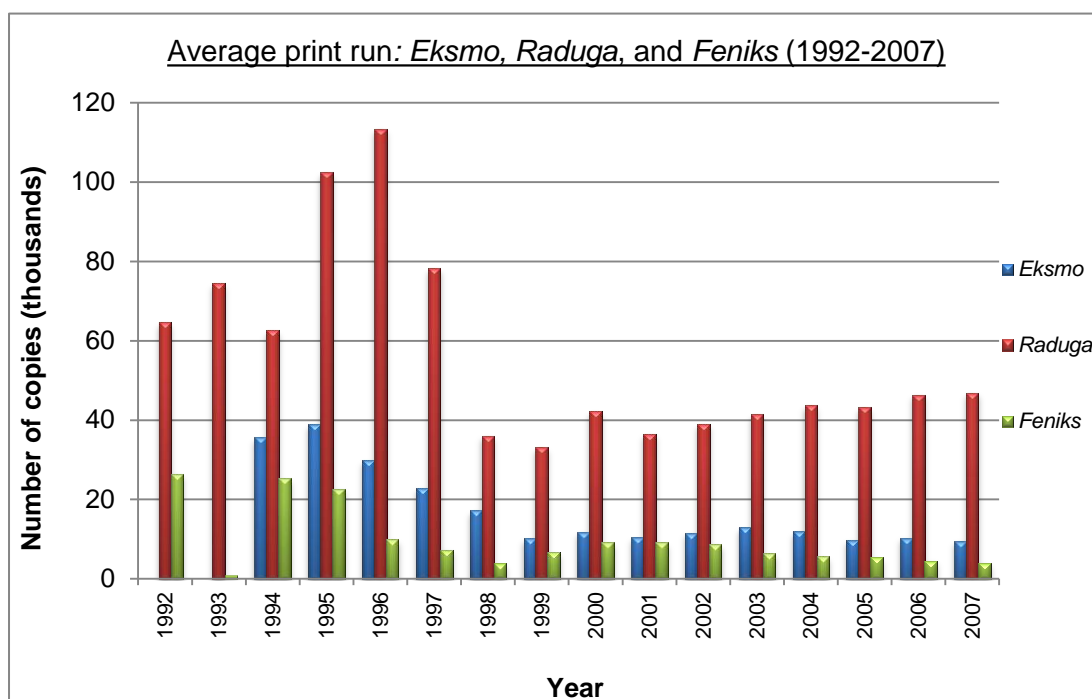


Figure 16: Average print run: *Eksmo*, *Raduga* and *Feniks* (1992-2007).

The average print run for the state publisher *Raduga* follows a different path. Not only is *Raduga*'s average print run far higher than that of either private publisher, it also illustrates an increase in recent years. The reason for *Raduga*'s significantly higher average print run may be that the sales of its popular romance series help to support the publication of its less profitable series, such as the *bilingvy* series. The retail price of a single copy from the romance series is relatively low, around thirty-five roubles, so in order to generate substantial income from these series a relatively large number of sales and a high enough print run to satisfy reader demand for these texts is required.³¹

³¹ Prices may vary between retailers. This was the price according to internet retail site www.ozon.ru (2008).

DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION

The problems regarding distribution become even more pertinent when considering individual publishers. If a publisher is to survive in the post-Soviet era, it is vital that it allows as many potential readers as possible the opportunity to buy its texts. *Eksmo* manages its own distribution network, with nine Regional Distribution Centres (RDCs) in Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev (Ukraine), Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan, Samara, Ekaterinburg, Rostov-on-Don and Almaty (Kazakhstan). Needless to say, *Eksmo*'s distribution network and representatives are concerned only with those texts that *Eksmo* produces, but arguably they have set the level at which other publishers must attempt to compete if they wish to get their texts to the readers and ultimately to remain in the book market. *Feniks* has also established representation in other Russian cities and regions aside from Rostov-on-Don. Texts published by *Feniks* are available to buy in Moscow and there are regional representatives located in both Moscow and St Petersburg. However, *Feniks* is not simply focused on the largest markets. In addition, its representatives operate in the Upper and Lower Volga regions, in the Krasnodar and Ural regions as well as in the cities of Chelyabinsk, Novosibirsk and Kiev in Ukraine. *Eksmo* has significant experience in the book distribution sector of the industry and it seems that for a private publisher to succeed it must ensure that its books are easily available to any interested reader.

In contrast to *Eksmo* and *Feniks*, *Raduga* appears only to promote its texts through Moscow's largest bookshops, direct from the publisher at a discounted price, or through internet stores such as www.ozon.ru. *Raduga*'s sales through internet bookstores appear to be its only attempt at wider regional dissemination. *Eksmo* also sells through various Moscow and St Petersburg bookshops, but in addition, its publications are sold through the *Novyi knizhnyi magazin* (*The new bookshop*) chain, which has twenty-seven stores throughout Russia. Although *Feniks*'s distribution network is not quite as extensive as that created by *Eksmo*, it appears to be attempting to follow a similar pattern in the way that it makes its texts available to readers. Throughout 2008, *Feniks* has opened fifteen bookshops in various cities in the Southern regions of Russia at a cost of 700,000 roubles per shop (Suvenir Segment 2007). The emphasis that *Eksmo* places on publicity for its texts is evident not only in its efforts to distribute its publications as widely as possible (a challenge to which it has successfully risen given its claim that every seventh Russian knows of at least one of *Eksmo*'s authors (*Eksmo* 2004a), but also in its promotional

tactics, including its monthly *EksmoDigest* detailing the latest new releases (*Eksmo* 2004c).

SERIALISING LITERATURE

As Menzel (2005) observed, the number of series that are available to Russian readers has increased since the collapse of the USSR. Yet the concept of producing a series was not a revelation that emerged only in the post-Soviet publishing world. During the Soviet period, *Raduga* had also attempted to widen its literary repertoire by introducing various series. It had introduced the series *Rodnik* (*Source*), which was made up of Russian classics, *Russkoe zarubezhe* (*The Russian Abroad*), which included works by Russian émigrés of the third wave, as well as the genre series *Istoricheskii roman* (*Historical Novel*), *Mastera sovremennoi fantastiki* (*Masters of Contemporary Fantasy*) and *Prizrak* (*Phantom*), the last of which was aimed at children (Karaichentseva 2000).

Arguably, the success of these series in the Soviet era prompted *Raduga's* collaboration in the immediate post-Soviet era with Canadian publisher *Harlequin*, with whom they produce three romantic series: *Lyubovnyi roman* (*Love Story*), *Iskushenie* (*Temptation*) and *Lyubov prekrasnoi damy* (*The Love of a Beautiful Woman*). In addition, *Raduga* has created several other series thanks to the income that is generated by the best-selling romantic series, although the number is significantly lower than the number of series published by private publishers *Eksmo* and *Feniks*. *Eksmo* publishes more than 1,300 series in eleven different categories, including reference books and encyclopaedias; histories, memoirs and biographies; children's literature; and detective fiction and thrillers (*Eksmo* 2004d). *Feniks* produces more than 300 series (*Feniks* 2003a). Although some of these series are comprised of just one text, the promotion of a series with more titles to follow gives the reader a sense of continuity and has the potential to generate excitement on the release of the next title in the series.

Conclusions

The experiences of the publishers used as case studies suggest that while there are some differences depending on ownership and location, the general trends that have been seen on a national level are reflected in the experiences of the three individual publishers. The financial crisis in 1998 had an impact on the output of each of the three publishers, although the times at which each publisher was affected had something of a regional bias. In addition, the changes to state support

in 2002 and 2006 have caused a decrease in the publishing levels of each of the publishers and in 2007, the only publisher to have addressed this decline in output is the privately owned, Moscow-based publisher, *Eksmo*. Although all three publishers feature in the 'top ten', there are notable differences in their output and the extent of monopolisation of the publishing industry can be seen even within the top publishers. In 2005, 2006 and 2007, *Eksmo*'s authors have accounted for at least ten of the twenty most widely published authors in Russia (Sirozhenko 2006 and 2007; Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008). Yet in spite of these high levels of monopolisation, it appears that much smaller publishers who produce far fewer titles and much lower print runs continue to survive. Arguably, readers know to which publishers they should turn if they require a certain type of text.

Eksmo, *Feniks* and *Raduga* are all attempting to find ways of solving the problems associated with distribution and of making their texts appealing to readers. It appears that privately owned publishers, regardless of location, put greater emphasis on distribution and promotion than the state-run publishers do. Both *Eksmo* and *Feniks* produce a large number of series compared with *Raduga* which produces significantly fewer, but which relies on its romantic series in order to produce enough profit to support its other, less widely read, but socially important series. In addition, are state publishing enterprises even in a position to attract the kinds of writers who could make them money? The issue is two-fold: can state publishers afford to pay writers who produce bestselling texts and do writers want to be published by a state-owned publisher given the history of writing, publishing and state patronage in the not too distant past?

Tracing the impact of the *Special Federal Programmes* is more difficult when considering the individual publishers in this chapter. None of the publishers makes significant comment about the *Special Federal Programme*, yet each of them records a dip in its output in the years when the renewal of funds from the state was under discussion. The end of state funding may exacerbate the monopolisation of the publishing industry and it will be interesting to note whether the top publishers of recent years retain their positions, making it impossible for the smaller top publishers such as *Feniks* to compete in a market dominated by *Eksmo*, *AST* and *Olma-Press*.

CONCLUSIONS

As Dwyer (2007) points out, it is necessary to exercise caution when considering the statistics associated with the relative size of print runs and numbers of titles produced. He argues that some commentators have assumed that such figures 'reflect the relative popularity of books and genres [...] among Russian readers; and thus they have used the publishing data to these ends' (2007, p.299). Such an assumption was true in the Soviet era: the publishing figures are impressive, yet the books produced were not what the reader necessarily wanted to read. However, in the post-Soviet era, publishers are ultimately trying to make money and, in theory, they are reluctant to publish texts they are unable to sell, suggesting that figures for print runs and titles can be used to a greater extent to inform understanding of reader demand.

The commercial role of literature as a saleable commodity since the collapse of the USSR is evident. The increase in the number of publishers and their varied locations demonstrate that the book industry is able to support a large number of texts and titles. The commercialisation of literature has enabled several publishers to become extremely powerful and there has been a shift from the Soviet state monopoly to the post-Soviet private monopoly. Yet, in spite of increasing monopolisation, it seems that Russia's size and the Moscow-centric nature of its publishing industry may be working to smaller publishers' advantage. The challenges of distribution and the relatively small markets of the provincial regions may mean that Moscow-based publishers do not see any financial reward in trying to expand their market much beyond the Moscow region, thus leaving the provincial publishers to exploit the provincial markets as they see fit. Arguably, the Moscow-centric nature of the publishing industry and the associated level of competition have been one of the reasons why the number of publishers in Moscow has declined, whereas the number in 'other' cities has risen.

The successful commercialisation of literature has allegedly enabled the altruistic side of the publishing industry to emerge. Owing to the success of some of their titles and series, publishers claim that they are in a position to publish works that may not sell as well, but are considered to be socially important as well as a positive contribution to the betterment of society, echoing Sir Basil Blackwell's sentiments: 'would the world be poorer without this book, or would I be poorer with it?'. Such a notion echoes the ideological aims of the Soviet era, but in contrast, readers have

the choice whether to buy such texts. However, it may be that publishers have only been releasing certain texts for the improvement of their readers because state support has been available for these particular types of text. If state support has ended, then the commercial aspect of literature will presumably take precedence again when it comes to taking decisions on which texts to produce. Arguably, the *Special Federal Programmes* have been designed in order to prevent censorship due to commercialisation, yet the rhetoric of each *Programme* has a distinctly Soviet tone, demanding that fiction texts published according to its specifications are '[...] works of Russian non-critical (positive) realism [and which] contribute to national pride in book publishing' (Government of the Russian Federation 1995).

The state support granted through the *Special Federal Programmes* does not appear to have given the state a significant influence over the particular texts that individual publishers produced. Although there is a somewhat ideological overtone to the *Special Federal Programmes*, state support during the intervals when these programmes were in operation was minimal and was aimed at supporting the text rather than the publisher. It could therefore be argued that, in this instance, the aims of the state support programmes were philanthropic rather than ideological, which has not been the experiences of others working in the field of literature. (As will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three respectively, the state has not maintained complete disinterestedness in literature. The experiences of the editorial board of *21st-Century Volga* attest to this, as do the various trials involving writers, the pornography trial that was brought against Sorokin and the imprisonment of Limonov are just two examples of the state's reluctance to allow writers absolute freedom.) It remains to be seen, however, whether the political influence over the type of literature produced has altered the commercial aspect of literature during the 1990s and early 2000s. Without state support, there is no doubt that many publishers would not have survived the first post-Soviet decade and it will be interesting to observe the changes in the number of publishers and their location in the post-federal support era.

CHAPTER TWO: THE 'THICK' LITERARY JOURNAL

Although subscriptions to the 'thick' literary periodicals have declined rapidly since the early 1990s, the continued presence of these journals on the Russian literary scene not only demonstrates an enduring interest in the texts that appear on their pages and the debate which surrounds them, but the survival of these journals exemplifies the varied functions that literature now has in the post-Soviet era. This chapter will explore the commercial role of literature in relation to the journals and it will examine the way in which this post-Soviet function of literature has forced the editors of these monthly periodicals to reconcile the moneymaking aspect of literature with their desire to print texts that provoke debate. In addition, the changing financial support that is available to the literary journals makes the political function of literature a pertinent area to be investigated. The role of literature as a subject to be discussed is particularly relevant to this chapter given the literary periodicals' history as pioneers for the cause of writers and literature and in light of claims by post-Soviet critics that there is no longer such a thing as Russian literature.

After offering a brief history of the literary periodicals, this chapter will subsequently consider the commercial and political functions of literature before analysing the role of literature as a subject of debate. Finally, it will examine the experiences of the long-established literary journals *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* and compare their situation with that of the 'glossy', lifestyle-magazine *Afisha*.³²

³² The 'glossy' magazines, or *glyantsevye zhurnaly*, such as *Elle*, *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan* appeared after *perestroika* when Western clothes and cosmetic products started to become available in Russia and people became more interested in fashion and consumer products. According to www.Cosmo.ru, 2009 is the fifteenth anniversary of the magazine's publication in Russia.

THE 'THICK' JOURNALS IN THE SOVIET ERA

The Russian literary journal is a well-established presence on the nation's literary scene and a detailed discussion of the history of these periodicals, although interesting, would not be a fruitful addition to this chapter.³³ However, knowledge of the literary periodicals' situation in the latter part of the Soviet era and the early years of the 1990s is necessary as it contributes to an understanding of the issues that have affected the role of literature in the second half of the 1990s and 2000s. Although the journals now occupy a relatively small place on the Russian literary scene, their contribution to Russia's literary history, as well as to its political life in the 1980s and 1990s, should not be underestimated: '[through the] combination of fiction and criticism, as well as through the social and political journalism they offered, these publications had shaped literary life in Russia and the Soviet Union ever since the early 1900s' (Menzel 2005, p.40).

NOT JUST A 'THICK' JOURNAL: 1986-1990

Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies caused two fundamental changes on the pages of the literary journals, which no doubt helped to contribute to the phenomenal circulation figures at the end of the 1980s. The first of these alterations to appear in the literary periodicals was to their ideological stance. 'Before the advent of *perestroika*, the Soviet literary press was regarded as a vehicle of education and ideology' (Shneidman 1995, p.23): *Novyi mir* was considered to be more liberal and along with *Znamya*, *Druzhba narodov* and *Yunost*, was described as one of the 'representatives of liberalizing pro-Gorbachev forces [which] did battle with its adversary *Nash sovremennik*, bastion of reactionary, anti-Semitic elements' (Chances 2005, p.72). The journal *Oktyabr* was also viewed as something of an anti-liberal counterpart to *Novyi mir*. The state's new approach and the appointment of journal editors to positions of power changed the messages that the literary journals transmitted.

'Yurii Voronov, a poet of the Leningrad blockade and at the same time Chief Editor of *Znamya* became the Head of the Central Committee's Culture Department. Vladimir Karpov, a modestly

³³ See Martinsen, (ed.) *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia* (1997) for a detailed discussion concerning literary journals prior to 1917.

talented author of war novels and Chief Editor of *Novyi mir*, was made First Secretary of the Writers' Union' (Pittman 1990, p.111).³⁴

Due to the changes made in 'the highest echelons of power' (Pittman 1990, p.111), the literary journals became a forum for debate about the political direction that the nation should adopt. Broadly speaking, the reactionary nationalist camp was represented by *Molodaya gvardiya* (Young guard), *Nash sovremennik* (Our contemporary) and *Moskva* (Moscow), while *Novyi mir* (New world), *Znamya* (Banner), *Druzhba narodov* (Friendship of the Peoples), *Literaturnaya gazeta* (Literary gazette) [which is a weekly publication], *Oktyabr* (October), *Neva* (Neva), *Sovetskaya kultura* (Soviet culture) and *Yunost* (Youth) comprised the opposition (Pittman 1990, p.112).

The second change that the literary journals underwent in the latter half of the 1980s was a shift in the content of the material that they published. Although life in the Soviet Union was more accurately represented in the literary journals than it was in the mass media, it was the 'balance between the space allotted to literary and to socio-political subjects [...] with the latter assuming an important, if not dominant, role' (Shneidman 1995, p.26) which helped to secure the periodicals' position as a favourite among readers. The 'ability of the journals' *publitsistika* to respond quickly to events of the day and to feed readers' reflections without delay' (Pittman 1990, p.120) further increased their appeal. Andrei Vasilevsky, editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir*, suggests that this change to the content of the texts that the journals were publishing in the late 1980s did not follow the 'traditional' rubric and that the content was encroaching on the territory of the mass media (cited in Voznesensky 2005). In contrast to Vasilevsky's beliefs that the periodicals had strayed away from their traditional role, Pittmann argues that

'conflicting views and attitudes ranging from pro-reform liberalism to reactionary nationalism and relating to the role of literature, theatre, cinema, art, the preservation of historical monuments, and cultural traditions' could be discussed in public (1990, p.112)

and that just 'as in the post-Stalin era and the 1960s [...], Soviet literary journals [were] transformed into a forum for debate between the reformist, conservative, and reactionary factions, each embracing a diversity of opinion groupings' (Pittman

³⁴ *Novyi mir* was edited by Vladimir Karpov from 1981-1986, by Sergei Zalygin from 1986-1998 and by Andrei Vasilevsky since 1998. *Znamya* was edited by Yurii Voronov from 1984-1986, by Grigorii Baklanov from 1986-1993 and by Sergie Chuprinin since 1993.

1990, p.111). However, the variety of the material published was not enough to prevent the significant decline in readership that the journals experienced in 1991, particularly when coupled with the fact that much of the 'returned literature', i.e. texts that were previously censored or forbidden by the Soviet leadership, such as works by Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn and Nabokov, had been published by 1990.³⁵

THE DECLINE OF THE 'THICK' JOURNALS: 1991-1995

Much has been made of the change in fortune experienced by the literary periodicals between 1989 and 1991. The reason for their decline was three-fold. The financial difficulties of the immediate post-Soviet period could not fail to have an impact on the literary journals. The population suddenly found that there was barely enough money for essentials, let alone for the indulgence of subscribing to even one literary journal. (At the height of the periodicals' success, many readers subscribed to several journals in order to gain access to the full breadth of newly available literature and commentary.) Yet, it was not only buyers who struggled with increasing costs: 'rising paper prices and printing expenses connected with the transition to a market economy unsettled the publishing business, and complicated the life of editors' (Shneidman 1995, p.27).

The second factor that influenced the literary periodicals' fall in popularity was the exhaustion of the 'returned' literature. One of the key features of the journals' success was the publication of previously banned or censored works, which the population was keen to read. However, by 1991, much of the formerly unseen material had been published and the public 'had become disenamoured with words that produced little practical benefit [...] tired of the continuous squabbles between different clans of intellectuals' (Shneidman 1995, p.26) and the main sources of journalism and criticism became 'newspapers, a growing number of smaller journals, [and] the so-called "glossy magazines"' (Menzel 2005, p.43). This trend was accelerated by the shift in the structure of the population after 1991. As Menzel points out, the intelligentsia suffered a loss in their cultural status, and there were changes to the 'old-guard' editors, who were replaced by 'ambitious professionals of the younger generation, with language skills and international know-how, whose concerns [were] often less moral than material' (2005, p.43). Such an alteration in

³⁵ See Lovell 'Literature and Entertainment in Russia: A Brief History' (2005, pp.27-28) for further details on 'returned literature'; the types of texts that were published and the impact that these texts had on those selling literature and those consuming it.

the editorship and the subsequent changes to the content of the journals may have alienated those among the journals' 'traditional' readership who could still afford to purchase their favourite periodical, thus further damaging the journals' prospects of survival.

Much of the academic work published in the West that is concerned with the fate of Russia's literary journals ends in the mid-1990s, when the debate about the journals' future was continuing, but was becoming stale because of the absence of any real change in the journals' situation. The threat of closure remained real even in 1994, when Shneidman observed that 'established journals, such as *Druzhba narodov* and *Znamya*, faced the perils of possible extinction' (1995, p.33). In spite of these concerns, the importance of the literary periodicals in 'Russia's social, political, and cultural life' continued to be recognised, and they provided an important forum for 'airing new ideological and philosophical ideas, as well as the political, national, and economic views of the Russian intellectual elite' (Shneidman 1995, p.29). Although discussions surrounding the significance of the literary journals may have subsided in the West, the debate about their role and future on the literary scene has continued among Russian journalists and scholars. Menzel suggests that the journals were initially responsible for linking

'the two metropolitan cultures with the vast periphery of the country and [they] played a major role in focusing the attention and identity of the intelligentsia on publications and public discussions, which were construed as "cultural events" involving the majority of the educated readership' (2005, p.40).

It seems that even in the post-Soviet era, the journals' function has not notably altered and while the provincial readers' demand for information on the contemporary literary scene remains, there is a role for the journals to fulfil.

Conclusions

In spite of a prolonged debate throughout the first part of the 1990s regarding the future of the literary periodicals, the concerns initially expressed seem to have subsided somewhat as critics and academics have found other issues to discuss. Yet, the challenges facing the literary journals at the beginning of the post-Soviet period seem not to have disappeared; financial uncertainties and an apparent lack of interest on the part of the reading public have continued throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. However, the editorial boards of the various journals have maintained that as long as there are readers, the journals will endeavour to fulfil

their role as disseminators of literature to the Russia beyond the Moscow ring road and the remainder of this chapter will explore the ways in which the changing role of literature has affected the journals' ability to circulate literature to the provinces.

THE 'THICK' JOURNAL VERSUS THE 'GLOSSY': THE COMMERCIALISATION OF THE LITERARY REVIEW

Since 1991, the debate about the future of the literary periodicals has persisted and despite many claims that the literary journals could not possibly survive in the post-Soviet capitalist market, their current existence, although small, is undeniable. The impact that the commercialisation of literature has had on the literary journals has been exacerbated by the appearance of 'glossy' magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* (1994) and *Afisha* (1999), which deal with all aspects of post-Soviet life. Many of the lifestyle magazines offer reviews on cultural pastimes, including recently published texts. Menzel draws attention to the position that 'newspapers, a growing number of smaller journals, the so-called 'glossy' magazines, and the most recent internet journals' (2005, p.43) occupy in terms of journalism and criticism and a growing number of bookshops allocate prominent shelf space to books that have been recommended by one or other of the 'glossy' magazines. This section will examine the way in which literature's commercial role has influenced the literary journals in terms of print run and subscription levels, distribution and online competition, and it will offer an analysis of the 'glossy' magazines' impact on the literary journals, and take into consideration the effect that growing internet use has on the traditional, paper-based consumption of periodicals.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE LITERARY PERIODICAL: PRINT RUN

The phenomenal success demonstrated by the literary journals in the late 1980s was inversely replicated in the early 1990s, prompting both Russian and Western critics and academics to voice concerns about the survival of the journals beyond the end of the decade. Dubin (2001) sounds surprised, yet pleased, to be able to report that the majority of the 'thick' journals continued to exist in 1994. Although many of the 'traditional' journals survived the early years of the post-Soviet era, changes in economic interests and the recognition that literature and culture had become commercially viable products altered the sphere in which the journals were operating. The variations in the circulation of magazines in general, and more specifically in the journals' print runs, illustrate the ways in which the commercial role of literature has affected readership levels and interest in Russian literature.

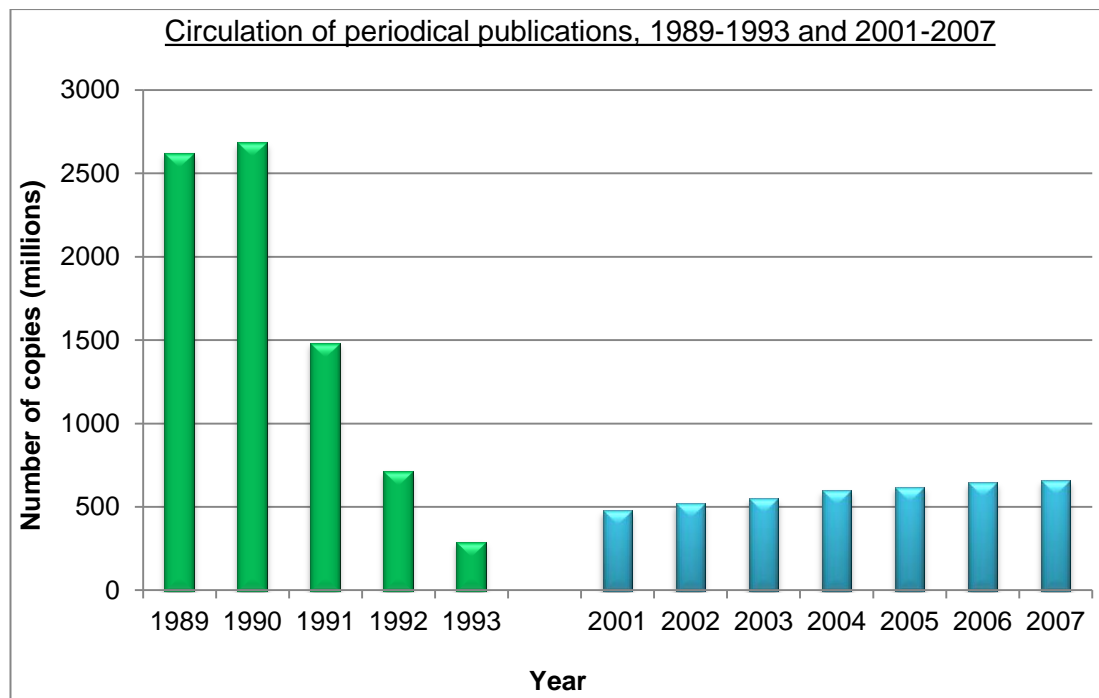


Figure 17: Circulation of periodical publications, 1989-1993 and 2001-2007.³⁶

The significant decline in the print run of periodical publications between 1990 and 1993 has been widely documented, when the unprecedented circulation peak of more than 2,500 million copies dropped to fewer than 300 million copies three years later.³⁷ Although 2,500 million copies may initially appear to be an impossibly high figure, it should be remembered that *Novyi mir* enjoyed a print run peak of 2.7 million copies in 1990, and was closely followed by *Znamya* and *Druzhba narodov*, which each produced one million copies at the height of the literary journals' success. In addition, *Oktyabr* and *Nash sovremennik* experienced print runs of 335,000 copies and 448,000 copies respectively. The high circulation figures that

³⁶ The figures for 1989-1993 are available at <http://postoronni.livejournal.com/110758.html>. The figures for 2001-2007 are provided by the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications (2005, p.9). Unfortunately, it has been impossible to find accurate figures representing the circulation of periodical publication figures between 1994 and 2001, so they have necessarily been omitted. However, the figures presented above clearly indicate the decrease in the circulation of the periodical press between the late Soviet period and the 2000s.

³⁷ It is important to recognise that this peak in the thick journals was also the height of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and was also the point at which Gorbachev himself was extremely popular in Western countries. The journals' success may have been bolstered by interest from the West, which diminished in the post-Soviet period as revelations about the USSR's past came to an end.

each of these literary periodicals reported in 1989 and 1990 demonstrate the considerable role that the journals played in reaching the 2,500 million copies figure.

Since 2001, the print runs of periodical publications have increased from 480 million to (a projected) 660 million in 2007 (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.9). Although such a figure may appear relatively impressive, it is barely more than a quarter of the 1990 peak figure. The current contribution made by the literary periodicals to the total periodical circulation is almost negligible. In 2006 and in 2008, the total print run of the 'top' eleven literary periodicals was quoted as 50,000 copies (Shchepotkin 2008). This figure, put forward by *Rospechat*, does not correspond with the print runs that are quoted by the individual journals themselves and reinforces the concern expressed by the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications that there is a lack of reliable data about print runs and readerships (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.7).

In spite of the inaccuracies associated with reporting the total print runs of the literary periodicals, it is clear that the journals' circulation figures have a very limited impact on the overall circulation of the periodical press and do not constitute any substantial competition for the other magazines and periodicals that are available. Although the Open Society Institute (OSI) provided almost a decade of support for the literary periodicals in the new, competitive, capitalist-style market, the funding made available did not give the literary journals any chance of competing with the 'glossy' magazines which emerged in the latter half of the 1990s. (Funding from the OSI will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.) The 'crisis' situation regarding the literary journals worsened in 1999 when the OSI announced its intention to withdraw funding. This decision could not have come at a worse time for the journals: between January 2000 and January 2005 the number of magazines registered in Russia almost doubled (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.16) and the print runs for 'glossy' magazines such as *Cosmo* and *Glamour* were reaching figures of more than one million copies and 600,000 copies respectively (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.19). The inability of the journals to form viable competition in the magazine and periodicals market has been exacerbated by the fact that the majority of literary journals are sold by subscription, whereas the 'glossy' magazines reach their readers through retail outlets.

JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTIONS: AN UNSOLVED PROBLEM

In spite of reports suggesting that the literary journals contribute very little to Russia's periodical press in terms of number of copies produced, journal editors are inclined to argue that the paper copy print run is not necessarily a true reflection of the actual number of people reading every issue of each journal. Many subscriptions continue to be taken out by those libraries that can still afford them and it has been proposed that each copy is read by a number of people, not just one subscriber. However, the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications believe that there 'is no complete information on the number of actual publications, their circulation [...], consumer demand, the demographic, educational, and social structure of the readership [...]' (2005, p.7). All of these are factors that have an impact on the literary periodicals and their print run. While editors may be prepared to believe that the journals available in provincial libraries are being read by more than one reader, there is evidence to suggest that more could be done to increase the number of people reading the periodicals.

A poll by *RosBiznesKonsalting* in May 2007 revealed that just over sixty-three per cent of more than 8,800 respondents never read the so-called 'thick' literary journals. Slightly fewer than six per cent of those polled replied that they did read the 'thick' periodicals and the remaining thirty per cent were unable to say whether they read this type of journal. Such responses reflect the answers to the question, 'How often do you read the "thick" journals?' posed by *polit.ru* (2003).

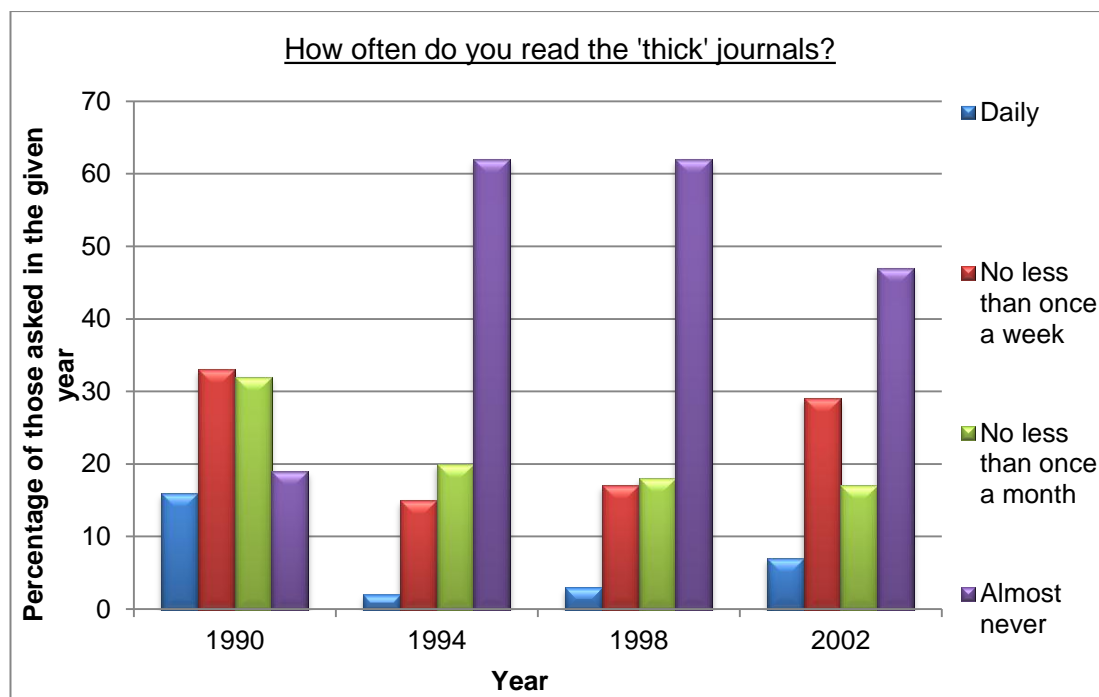


Figure 18: How often do you read the 'thick' journals?³⁸

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the figures for those who almost never read the journals are highest in 1994 and in 1998. In 1994, the reign of the literary journal had ended. The financial crisis in 1998 undoubtedly affected subscriptions to periodicals, with many readers being forced to forgo luxuries such as literary journals. Although the number of people who almost never read the 'thick' periodicals fell in 2002, the figure was still almost fifty per cent, more than twice the 1990 figure for non-journal readers. However, there were marked increases between 1998 and 2002 in the numbers of people reading the 'thick' periodicals on a daily or weekly basis, up from three per cent to seven per cent for daily readers and from seventeen per cent to twenty-nine per cent for the weekly readers.

In an attempt to prevent subscription rates from falling further, different editors have announced a variety of measures to ensure the survival of their periodical. The editors of *Nash sovremennik* promised their readers that subscription rates for 2005 and 2006 would not be increased even though the journal was in arrears, based on the proviso that a sufficient number of readers continued their subscription. *Nash sovremennik* continues to be published on a monthly basis and it was the only journal to increase its subscription level in 2006 (Marsh 2007, p.56). From 2004, the

³⁸ See www.polit.ru, 'Chtenie v kontekste massovykh kommunikatsii' ('Reading in the context of mass communications', 2003).

editorial board of *Znamya* was pleased to offer readers the option of subscribing for one to six months or for twelve months. Arguably, the relatively recent introduction of this option for subscribers may have been because of a stabilisation in the print runs after the turmoil of the 1998 crisis, which was then followed by the departure of Soros in 1999.

However, for many readers, the journals' subscription rates are far beyond their means, particularly for those who have retired, or who live beyond the Moscow ring road. Even within the Moscow region, a single edition of *Novyi mir* costs 325.57 roubles on subscription through www.interpochta.ru.³⁹ Other literary journals which are also listed as 'bestsellers' on *Interpochta's* website cost a similar amount. A year's subscription to *Znamya*, which is the most expensive journal, costs more than 4,400 roubles. At the lower end of the spectrum, *Nash sovremennik* costs the subscriber a little less than 3,000 roubles.⁴⁰ These prices show a significant increase in the cost of subscriptions. In 2003, a six-month subscription to *Novyi mir* was 414 roubles (*Zhurnalnyi zal*. [n.d.]a). By 2005, the half-yearly cost to the reader had risen to around 650 roubles in Moscow and was even higher in the regions (Vasilevsky cited in Tolstoy 2005). In contrast, the subscription cost for twelve months (24 issues) of *Afisha* is 2,000 roubles.⁴¹

It can be argued that the journals have found their base level. The print runs of the various journals have remained relatively stable for the past six years. In addition, the numbers of people who claim to read the journals on a regular basis have remained steady and although the numbers of readers who read a 'thick' journal on a daily basis was only seven per cent of the population in 2002, such a percentage equates to 9.8 million people who have access to a journal every day.

³⁹ See the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, *The Russian Periodical Press Market: 2006. Situation, Trends, Prospects* (2006, p.44). This price includes the following: the publisher's price, agency expenses and fees and delivery costs. However, it is virtually impossible to buy any of the literary periodicals from a newsstand. Copies can be bought direct from the periodicals' offices, but of course this is only possible for those who live locally.

⁴⁰ Details available from www.interpochta.ru, correct as at January 2009.

⁴¹ A single edition of *Novyi mir* at 325 roubles is the equivalent of more than £7. A year's subscription to *Znamya* at 4,400 roubles is a little under £100. The average annual salary in Russia in 2005 was 153,720 roubles, approximately £3,400.

OBTAINING ACCESS: DISTRIBUTION DIFFICULTIES

In addition to the high cost of subscriptions, there are continuing problems with the system used for distributing the periodicals. The Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications suggests that the 'country's vast territory, severe climate, inadequate transport and communications facilities, [and] low population density [...]' (2005, p.6), are all factors that have a significant impact on the distribution system. In addition, the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications notes that 'subscriptions to the periodical press could be higher' (2005, p.33). According to the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, part of the reason that subscriptions have remained static since 2000 is because of the poor methods of distribution. However, bungled attempts to reform the system in 2006 resulted in the 'tarnish[ed] image of the new rates system' and 'made it much more difficult for many people to exercise their constitutional right to equal access to information irrespective of their place of residence' (2006, pp.44-45).⁴²

The problems associated with the distribution of periodicals have provoked complaints from readers, many of whom suggest that there is little point in subscribing because it simply takes so long for the periodicals to arrive. (Arguably, this is less of a problem for those subscribing to monthly journals than it is for those who subscribe to daily or weekly papers through the same subscription system.) In an online forum discussion in 2008, which asked whether respondents read periodicals, one contributor, 'gumanitarnyi tekhnolog', suggests that it is the 'thick' journals themselves which are at fault for the poor distribution of their publications and 'Viktor' from Omsk highlights the fact that neither he, nor any of his friends,

⁴² The Russian Postal Service is responsible for the subscription service, which is categorised by law as a commercial undertaking and not a state-funded enterprise. In 2006, the Russian Postal Service introduced a new method of calculating delivery rates. However, the implementation of these new subscription rates was beset with problems. The new rates were announced only after the subscription catalogues for the first six months of 2006 had already been printed which meant that publishers had no time to adapt their subscriptions to the change. The negative reaction of regional publishers prompted the Russian Postal Service to lower the rates for local publications. The Service declared that it realised the social importance of subscription and for this reason local publishers were entitled to lower delivery rates compared with the central press. But no criteria were established for differentiating between local and national publications (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2006).

have seen *Novyi mir* in Siberia and wonders whether it is even possible to buy a copy (Tolstoy 2005). In an interview, Vasilevsky contends that one of the key problems associated with the distribution of the journals through retailers is the number of companies with which the editor must work in order to supply the whole of Russia's readership with his or her journal (Voznesensky 2005). Even Moscow is not covered by a single company that can arrange the placing of the journal in a variety of retail establishments.

In contrast to the literary periodicals, of which the majority are sold by subscription and are almost impossible to buy from a newsstand, the 'glossy' magazines are in relative abundance, with just five per cent of their print run issued through subscription (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.33). The leading 'glossy' magazines send around forty-five per cent of their monthly output to the regions (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.20) and the ability of the 'glossy' magazines to make such a large proportion of their copies available to readers in the regions raises several questions regarding the literary periodicals' attempts at distribution. It is important to recognise that the 'glossy' magazines comprise part of the competition that the literary journals face in the periodicals market and it could be argued that subscription levels will never rise if readers are able easily to buy a copy of *Afisha* from their local newsstand and read their purchase immediately rather than waiting for their copy of *Novyi mir* or *Znamya* to drop through the letterbox.

The Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications suggests that the population's purchasing power in the regions is limited, with income spent on necessities rather than luxuries. Yet the high percentage of 'glossy' magazines that is being sent to the regions suggests that readers are prepared to spend any extra income on items such as magazines. It may be argued that if the literary journals were able to remove the intermediary and sell through the retail industry rather than by expensive subscription they would be in a better position to compete with the 'glossy' magazines. As a point of comparison, the Moscow cover price for *Novyi mir* if purchased directly from the journal's offices is seventy roubles. The cover price of *Afisha* when bought from a newsstand varies according to the location from which it is purchased. Although some mark-up may be necessary, it seems very likely that buying each of the twelve issues of a literary periodical based on its cover price would be significantly lower than the current twelve-month subscription and make it more competitive with the 'glossy' magazines.

Of course, the readers of the 'glossy' magazines are likely to be quite different from those who enjoy reading the literary periodicals: Vasilevsky suggests that the readership of *Novyi mir* is predominantly comprised of provincial pensioners. However, the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications has highlighted the importance of the internet in maintaining interest in any type of periodical and in this the 'thick' literary journals appear to be ahead of the times. Since 2001, every issue of the most popular literary journals (and more minor journals) has been available without subscription from *Zhurnalnyi zal* (<http://magazines.russ.ru>). By providing an online version of their publication, the literary periodicals are attempting to appeal to a new generation of readers, while maintaining the support of their 'traditional' readership. Of course, such a turn towards electronic versions of the literary periodicals has prompted questions about the sustainability of paper editions and raised concerns about whether the journals will be responsible for their own demise (Tolstoy 2005, Basinsky 2007).

'WILL THE E-JOURNAL DESTROY ITS PAPER PARENTS?'

According to the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, 'any talk of the online media presenting a threat to the print media is premature' (2005, p.10), yet it is widely acknowledged that any journal, literary or 'glossy', should have an online variant, whether it is simply a reproduction of the current month's issue, or a supplement to the paper version (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2007, p.26). However, the free online availability of the twenty or more leading literary periodicals has prompted commentators to question whether the electronic version will be the death of the paper copy. The journal editors have a well-rehearsed answer to such a question: the audiences are different. Those who subscribe or read the paper copies that continue to be available in some libraries are usually older, more often than not pensioners living in the regions of Russia and who are unable to access the journal via the internet, or have no interest in doing so. In addition, Natalya Ivanova points out that

'reading a periodical online is not the same as being able to take a paper copy in one's hands, to lie on the sofa and read it, to open it at the reviews, then to stop and think, then to read the editor's column, then to turn to poetry [...]' (Tolstoy 2005).

Those who read the journals online belong to the younger generation and undoubtedly read the journals in a different way from those who read the paper

versions.⁴³ Sergei Kostyrko, who works on the <http://magazines.russ.ru> project, suggests that there are up to 10,000 visitors to the site each day (Basinsky 2007), a fact corroborated by the website's traffic counter. Vasilevsky considers making the literary periodicals available online to be positive: that rather than reducing the number of people who read the literary journals, the number is in fact increasing. However, it has been suggested that if the journals were to begin charging a subscription to their online publications, readers would not be prepared to pay for access; they would simply turn elsewhere (Anon, personal interview 2007). The threat posed by the electronic availability of literature is not from electronic versions of the journals themselves. It is not even from the online versions of the 'glossy' magazines, whose sites are more interactive than <http://magazines.russ.ru>. The greatest threat to the paper journals from online literature is the *samizdat* nature of the internet, where people will always be able to access literature without having to pay for it.

Conclusions

Although the circulation figures for the literary journals have decreased significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fact that the journals continue to exist in such a competitive market indicates that there is still a core readership that is interested in the texts that the journals publish and review. In addition, this core readership is prepared to pay the high subscription costs or make the effort to visit their local library in order to read the journal, as well as to put up with the associated distribution problems. Arguably, as the older generation, who are cited as the journals' main readers, dies out, then so too will the literary periodicals. If such a theory is correct, then the journal editors would be wise to address the subscription and distribution issues sooner rather than later and try to secure the next generation of readers. However, the continued existence of the literary journals in such a

⁴³ See Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, *The Russian Periodical Press Market: 2006. Situation, Trends, Prospects* (2006, p.53), which details internet penetration in Russia. In 2006, there were 25 million internet users in Russia, who represented twenty-two per cent of the adult population. In the same year the average internet user was 30 years old, although 18-24 year olds were the greatest internet users (comprising thirty-five per cent), followed by 25-34 year olds (twenty per cent), 35-45 year olds (ten per cent) and 45+ (just four per cent) (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2006, p.54). In 2007, the majority of internet users lived in Moscow or St Petersburg and fewer than ten per cent of internet users lived in small towns or villages (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2007, p.61).

competitive climate suggests that there remains scope for them to publish as they have been doing since the demise of the USSR.

In general, the impact that the commercialisation of literature has had on the literary journals has been negative. Although the notion of literature as a moneymaking device has proven successful in the book publishing industry, the boom in the number of book titles produced has been detrimental to the literary journals, which have struggled in post-Soviet Russia's new economic climate. The increased price of literature (particularly via subscription) has been one of the most significant factors affecting the number of people who are able to access the literary journals. Although free online availability to the literary periodicals has made them more widely obtainable in Russia's urban areas, it also places the literature that they produce in competition with other forms of literature that writers (professional or otherwise) are prepared to give away for nothing.

In addition, the absence of reliable statistics regarding Russia's press industry and the discrepancies between the state and industry figures should be an area of concern for the journal editors. If the underestimation of the journals' circulation continues, then there is no reason why the authorities might not use the incorrect figures to their advantage to cease the partial funding of certain projects or to penalise the journals for tax reasons.

FUNDING THE JOURNALS: PURELY COMMERCIAL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED?

There was no question when the Soviet Union disintegrated that the journals would require some form of financial support. Having previously been granted funds from the state in return for supplying sound ideological rhetoric, the legal changes that occurred in the early 1990s meant that along with the independence to publish exactly what they wanted came the responsibility of financing the journals as commercial enterprises. 'Many publications rebelled against their sponsoring parent organisation and sought total independence. [...] Thus *Znamya* declared its independence from the USSR Writers' Union, while *Oktyabr* severed its ties with its patron the RSFSR Writers' organisation' (Shneidman 1995, p.23). However, as print runs and subscriptions fell and the cost of paper rose, the journals found that they were struggling to survive. Attempts to increase the amount of advertising space without increasing the number of pages, or by issuing a bi-monthly edition rather than the regular monthly copy did not help to ease the situation and served to anger readers who had paid their subscription fees. As a result, in 1992, just two years after the record print runs, Grigory Baklanov asked the Soros Foundation for help, which was granted through the 'Open Society' Institute (OSI). This section of the chapter will briefly examine the support that the OSI gave the journals via the Russian library network and will compare the motivation behind this funding with the reasons for the financial backing that the state has offered since 2000.

FUNDING FROM THE 'OPEN SOCIETY' INSTITUTE

Initially, the OSI paid the subscription fee for eight journals for libraries throughout Russia. By 1999, when the OSI announced the end of funding, it was paying the subscription to more than twenty journals and had made a contribution of more than ten million dollars. In 'real' terms, the OSI's financial aid equated to 3,850 copies of every 'thick' journal. Therefore, the withdrawal of this money inevitably had an impact on the journals and their ability to continue publication.

When the OSI announced its plan to scale down the funding which had helped the literary periodicals during the 1990s, journal editors were quick to emphasise that the OSI support had in fact been directed towards Russia's regional libraries to ensure that the periodicals did not disappear from the catalogues of libraries hit by financial difficulties, rather than supporting the journals directly. The reason for supporting the libraries in their ability to subscribe to the 'thick' journals was to

ensure that every member of the population had access to these periodicals and not to keep the journals alive (Kravchenko 2000). Yet in spite of the suggestion that the support of the journals was simply a fortunate 'side-effect' of the assistance awarded to the libraries, the majority of journal editors acknowledged that the changes to funding would have an impact on their subscription levels and income and they highlighted the efforts that they had made to secure other sources of funding (Kravchenko 2000). *Nash sovremennik* had ensured that during the years of funding from the OSI it made links with writers from the regions, not just with writers from the capital (Kravchenko 2000). Gennady Gusev, deputy editor of *Nash sovremennik*, asserted that as a result of the issues featuring writers from Vologda, Kirov and in the Republic of Bashkortostan, the journal had been able to forge links with the governors in these areas and had secured some form of financial support (Kravchenko 2000). In contrast to the Moscow-based journals, the provincial journal *Volga* struggled to find other sources of income (Kravchenko 2000). Borovikov explains that in spite of experiencing first-hand a lack of consistency in the OSI's subscription support, the editors failed to secure other forms of financial support and that this contributed to the closure of *Volga* in 2000 (Kravchenko 2000).⁴⁴

Although the OSI assured the editors of the literary periodicals and the libraries that received the 'free' subscriptions that they would not be abandoned, there is little evidence to suggest that this amounted to more than the OSI paying for the first half-year subscription to eight journals in 2000.⁴⁵ The Ministry of Culture and the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications agreed to pay for the second six-month subscription (splitting the cost between the two ministries), but would not commit to funding of a similar nature to that supplied by the OSI beyond the end of 2000. Since the initial support received from the Ministry of Culture and the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, Vasilevsky has suggested that the possibility of *Novyi mir* ceasing publication has remained real (Shenkman 2008) and that the situation has become increasingly difficult since the state declared that only 'socially important projects' would be granted funding.

⁴⁴ See *Volga*, 'Dorogie chitateli' (2000) for the letter written by *Volga*'s editorial board to the readers concerning the closure of the journal.

⁴⁵ See Kravchenko, 'Proshchai, Dyadushka Soros! Tolstye zhurnaly v novoi situatsii' (2000). The OSI suggested that the curtailment of their funding would be replaced by a scheme that would support rural libraries. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that their plan reached fruition.

PICKING UP WHERE SOROS LEFT OFF: STATE SUPPORT FOR THE JOURNALS

State support for the periodical press has continued since the conclusion of the OSI funding for library subscriptions. In 2004, it was recognised that 'targeted government support [...] for certain periodicals [was] essential if the constitutional right to free access to information [was] to be guaranteed' (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005, p.40). To that end, the federal budget has awarded increasing sums of money to various 'socially important projects'. In 2005, periodicals which had been published regularly for at least one year and had a circulation of at least one thousand copies were eligible to apply for a share in the 48 million roubles made available by the state, for a 'one-off subsidy' that could not be used solely for the reimbursement of paper, printing, or distribution costs (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2005). The regulations surrounding the sorts of periodicals that could apply for money in 2006 and in 2007 remained the same. Publications were expected to 'deal with promoting priority national projects, family values and a healthy lifestyle; fighting corruption, crime, and drug addiction; eradicating racial and religious strife; ensuring safety on the roads; commemorating memorial and historical dates; publicising Russia's achievements in science, culture, and the arts; developing interethnic communication and the creativity of Russia's ethnic groups' (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2006, p.28). More than 120 million roubles were available for such publications in 2006 (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2007, p.48) and in 2007 this amount had risen to more than 150 million roubles (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2008, p.96).

Another challenge faced by the literary periodicals now that they are no longer guaranteed some form of financial aid is the change to the rate of VAT that periodicals have to pay. Prior to 2005, periodicals enjoyed a preferential VAT rate of ten per cent on their sales. Since changes to the law, those copies sold by subscription rather than through retail are subject to a non-preferential VAT rate of eighteen per cent. As the 2005 Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications report highlights, such a method of taxation is 'illogical, to put it mildly' (2005, p.46). The majority of publications deemed to be 'socially important' are sold through subscription because they are of interest to a particular niche audience, so the higher taxation rate is something of a contradiction. The way in which VAT is paid further contributes to the financial struggles that periodicals must contend with in order to remain in business.

‘Publishers constantly overpay the government with vague prospects of getting back surplus money. Thus, having received subscription money in the beginning or middle of the year, they have to pay full VAT at once, although the subscription contracts run for the next six months or a year. The procedures for returning, writing off and paying taxes for unsold copies, [...] have not been streamlined’ (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2007, p.48).

Yet in spite of discussions on taxation which have concluded that ‘the Russian system of taxation of periodicals and books on education, science and culture should be revised with due regard for their role as a socially important commodity and the specific features of their production and marketing’ (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2008, p.97), it appears that decisive action is yet to be taken.

The lack of urgency with which the state transfers funds to those who have won monies for socially important publications further exemplifies the attitude that the government has with regard to the periodicals. In both 2005 and 2006 funds awarded for the first quarter were not paid across until April of the respective years. No reason for the delays was offered (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2006, p.28). Although the state promises funds on the basis that the Russian population has a constitutional right to free access to information, it seems that there is limited understanding that many of these periodicals rely heavily on this funding to ensure that they fulfil the projects which the state money funds and there is no guarantee to ensure that the government keeps its side of the agreement.

More worrying is the fact that in spite of the creation of the Law on Mass Media and Other Communications (1990), which declares that there is officially no state censorship in Russia, there is evidence to suggest that periodicals supported by state money may not be entirely independent. The Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications report of 2005 argued that ‘as many periodicals are dependent on different influence groups or political forces, they practise some measure of self-restraint’ (2005, p.7). Reservations about state support for the periodicals have been voiced on other fronts. In 2000, Aleksandr Voznesensky suggested that ‘there is obviously a “but” associated with the financing of the ‘thick’ journals by the ministries and it calls into question their very legitimacy’. Such concerns continued to be voiced well into the 2000s, when ‘selective financial

support for the 'friendly' media from regional and local budgets remain[ed] an urgent issue' (Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications 2006, p.30). Clearly old memories of the Soviet state's relationship with the periodical press have not been forgotten and while many acknowledge that without state support the journals would find it increasingly difficult to survive, there is a sense that the freedom of these periodicals could be compromised.

The anxiety regarding the government's support for literary periodicals has been justified in the light of the state's actions concerning the literary periodical *21st-Century Volga*. In 2006, the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications declared a competition for the publication of a new incarnation of the journal *Volga*, which had closed in 2000. The competition to produce *21st-Century Volga* was won by Saratov journalist, entrepreneur and publisher, Sergei Grishin, who called upon the former editorial board of the old periodical, *Volga*, to work for him. However, the publication was short-lived, producing just four issues before a disagreement with the Saratov regional administration resulted in the removal of the editorial staff from the publication of *21st-Century Volga* (*Zhurnalnyi zal* [n.d.]b). This conflict arose because of one particular poem by Sergei Trunev, which demonstrated the 'incorrect treatment of the theme of "motherland" from the point of view of official patriotism' and because of the novel *Povest vremennykh let* (*A tale of years gone by*) by Valery Volodin, which the journal publishers initially wanted to amend and then demanded its removal from the journal on the basis of 'undesirable associations' that some readers experienced when reading it' (*Ekho Moskvy* 2008).⁴⁶ The dispute between the editors and the regional administration and publishers means that *21st-Century Volga* has not been published since April 2008.

As well as changes to the regulations governing state support for the periodicals, there is a sense that perhaps the state is not particularly interested in contributing to the survival of Russia's literary heritage. Such negative sentiments are not new. In the early 1990s, Egor Gaidar suggested that the 'collapse of the 'thick' journal would not be a tragedy, but simply 'normal' (cited in Marsh 2007, p.53). His attitude continues to pervade some sections of the government, perhaps most alarmingly in

⁴⁶ Sergei Trunev's poems are available in the last issue of *21st-Century Volga* (2008, 3-4). Valery Volodin's text has appeared in one issue of *21st-Century Volga* (2007, 9-10) and three issues of *Volga* (2009, 5-6; 2010, 1-2; 2011, 3-4), which is now being published again.

the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications itself. In 2000, Mikhail Seslavinsky, the one-time head of the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications, suggested that ‘the “thick” journals were obsolete’, that they served a purpose when there was a long delay between texts appearing in the journals and being published in book form and that while this is not in itself a reason to shut the periodicals, there is no sense in trying to increase the print runs (Kommersant 2000). These ideas have prompted the editors of the literary press to respond: Yury Polyakov, editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaya gazeta*, believes that ‘there is simply no political will or understanding that it is not possible simply to disregard such age-old things as the “thick” literary periodicals of Russia, regardless of their sympathies’ (Yakovlev 2002). This suggests an awareness, that in spite of every effort on their part, editors still face an uphill struggle to garner support from the state.

Conclusions

The partial funding of the literary journals by the state has undoubtedly been in some way politically motivated and rather than ensuring that every member of the Russian population has free access to these types of publication, the government funding appears to have compromised the integrity of these journals. The situation that the journal *21st-Century Volga* has found itself in demonstrates that state funding will only be granted on the proviso of adherence to certain regulations and that the consequences of non-compliance will be the confiscation or complete suspension of funds. The reasons given for the removal of Sergei Trunev’s poem from the journal are reminiscent of the rhetoric used in the Soviet era.

Even if the situation regarding the journal *21st-Century Volga* is an isolated incident, it could be contended that the absence of interest in the literary periodicals demonstrated by state officials and the lack of urgency in transferring funds that have been guaranteed for the fulfilment of particular state-approved projects amount to a form of censorship. Delays in the payment of funding jeopardise the output of the journals and the indifference to the discrepancies surrounding both the level and the payment of VAT indicates the relative unimportance with which the state regards the literary journals. Although the state appears not to consider the literary periodicals to be a threat, the criteria used to define ‘socially important’ projects and the government’s actions when dealing with the journal *21st-Century Volga* suggest a reluctance to allow completely free rein to a medium that has previously been an outspoken critic of the leadership.

THE 'THICK' JOURNALS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ABOUT LITERATURE

In a newspaper interview, Vasilevsky suggests that the late Soviet-era journals were not fulfilling their traditional role as reviewers of contemporary literature (Voznesensky 2005) and Zalygin maintained that the ability of *publitsistika* to respond quickly to the changing situation in the Soviet Union was a key reason for the journals' successes in the late 1980s (Pittman 1990, p.120). Since the disintegration of the USSR, it could be argued that the journals have returned to their more traditional role of publishing new texts and different authors and discussing contemporary literature. Critics have claimed that post-Soviet literature is in 'crisis' because there have been no new works that are worth discussing. However, the continued existence of the literary journals, whose traditional function is to comment on contemporary literature, would suggest that there remains something to say about today's literature. This section will explore the idea that literature continues to provide points for discussion and that the literary journals make a significant contribution to these debates. In investigating the role that literary journals play in the discussion of literature, it will evaluate whether there continues to be a purpose for the journals in pursuing this path. In addition, this chapter will offer an analysis of the sorts of literature that are discussed in the periodicals and compare the assessment of contemporary literature that the journals provide with that offered by the 'glossies'.

THE ROLE OF THE LITERARY PERIODICALS

In 1995, Shneidman lamented the fact that 'the literary press [paid] little attention to the discussion of serious theoretical literary issues or to the review of currently published prose or poetry' (1995, p.29). However, it seems that in the 2000s his concerns are outdated and that the literary journals have found a niche in which the information that they provide is eagerly consumed by their readers. In one of his many conversations about the fate of the literary journals, Vasilevsky identifies four key areas in which the literary periodicals are vital to the discussion about literature (Yakovlev 2002). The first is as a disseminator of information about contemporary literature. Beyond the Moscow ring road, there is a relative shortage of literature, in all its forms and Vasilevsky declares that the journals are able to provide a 'picture' of the contemporary literary scene in a way that books cannot. Second, he believes that the 'normal literature' that was promised in the late 1980s and early 1990s has proven to be both unnecessary and uninteresting and that the journals are able to

present literature combined with other subjects: 'literature plus politics, literature plus philosophy, literature plus religion [...]' (Yakovlev 2002). The third role of the literary journal is to publish those writers whom the older generation remember, but who are no longer written about or widely published. Finally, the journals should print translations of texts written in the languages of the peoples of Russia and the languages of the former Soviet Union (Yakovlev 2002).

In a subsequent interview, Vasilevsky clarifies his point: 'the goal of the "thick" periodicals is not in the finding and printing of a masterpiece, but in supporting a "normal" literary sphere [...] and in such an atmosphere, a masterpiece may appear' (Shenkman 2008). Furthermore, readers are not buying the literary periodicals for specific publications; they are buying them 'as a whole [...] to find out what is going on in the world of contemporary literature' (Shenkman 2008), which suggests that the journals play a fundamental role on the contemporary literary scene by filling in the gaps that are created by popular literature and the mass consumption of this literature. Moreover, if the journals are to encourage more people to be interested in literature, then the time has come to stop 'harping on about not having any kind of literature, that everything is terrible, that writers are bad and that poetry is in crisis' and to emphasise the fact that, 'contrary to the comments of the last fifteen years, Russia does have its own literature and in fact, it is good literature' (Vasilevsky cited in Voznesensky 2005). In the absence of a fully functioning book distribution system, one of the roles that the journals play is in bringing contemporary literature to Russia's provincial population and that the attitudes that the journals express when discussing the nation's literature can have a considerable impact on the way in which this literature is viewed.

CONTEMPORARY DOES NOT MEAN POPULAR

The decisions regarding the works that are published and reviewed in the literary journals are not easy to make, particularly in the light of relatively low readership numbers. When discussing the literary periodicals' content and how the literature that they choose to publish influences their readership statistics, it is frequently suggested that the journals should publish the sorts of texts for which there is demand. Yan Shenkman (2008) asks why *Novyi mir* does not publish detective stories, excerpts from bestsellers, or diaries of the rich and famous, because such texts would encourage readers to pick up the journals. The response to such a proposal is that the 'traditional' subscribers to the journals would stop reading them and that the readers who enjoy novels by writers such as Boris Akunin, Darya

Dontsova, or Oksana Robski would not look inside the literary journals for these types of texts. Readers expect certain things of the journals and mass culture is not it. The journals' sphere is 'serious, non-commercial literature' and readers are interested in writers who 'at the moment of writing are not thinking about the income their text will generate or the size of the print run, but about the text itself' (Shenkman 2008).

If the journal editors are wary of publishing popular literature that appeals to the mass reader, then the question must surely be asked: what sort of contemporary literature do the journals publish? Comments made by Vasilevsky illustrate the fact that editors are prepared not to publish texts, even if they consider them to be relevant to literature and to culture at a given moment in time, because they fear that their provincial, more conservative readership will abandon them (Voznesensky 2005). The changing state of the publishing industry may also have had an impact on the works that the journals choose to publish, particularly if they are attempting to preserve their traditional readership. It used to be the case that there was a substantial period between a text's publication in one of the literary periodicals and its appearance in book form. Now that writers are no longer desperate to publish their latest works in the journals, editors have been forced to find other texts, such as poetry, that may be considered contemporary, but would not be described as popular. Konstantin Bandurovsky (2006) suggests that the literary periodicals are the only mechanism which introduce the reader to new material and that they are responsible for the distribution of poetry and the education of the reader. He argues that the literary journals provide a vital place for publishing the poetry of young and old writers, poets from Russian villages and Canadian cities, well-known authors and those who have never been published before, but that their methods for reviewing poetry anthologies or collections are poor (Bandurovsky 2006). A critical article dedicated to the tendencies of contemporary poetry is something of a rarity. Arguably, if the literary journals, once famed for their criticism and discussion of newly published texts, are no longer providing such articles, then perhaps the readership's preference for the book reviews published in 'glossy' magazines and newspapers should not be surprising.

THE 'GLOSSY' MAGAZINE REVIEW

The magazine market and the places to which readers turn for information about the texts they should read have changed significantly since the early 1990s. The apparent decline in comprehensive book reviews was raised by Igor Shevelev in

2001: 'Where are the critics? Where are the reviews in which readers can trust? Where are the prizes for "books of the month"?' Yet, as Menzel points out, 'criticism has shifted [...] the major critical genre has become the short book review, whose role is to inform readers succinctly' (2005, p.53) and such reviews are not found in the literary periodicals, but in the 'glossy' magazines. The reviews that appear in the 'glossies' also concern contemporary literature, but unlike the literary journals, the works reviewed are popular. In addition, many bookshops base their sales promotions around books that are featured in the pages of the 'glossy' magazines. It is quite common to enter a bookshop and see shelves dedicated to books 'as recommended by *Elle* or *Afisha*', but to find a promotion based on the advice of *Novyi mir* or *Znamya* would be unusual.

Conclusions

The role of the literary journal in the discussion of contemporary literature remains important, yet it seems that their focus has moved away from prose to the more marginalised genres. In wishing to offer their readers a text that can be discussed at a higher level than mass literature, there have been accusations that the journals want to appeal only to their traditional readership and to a conservative audience. Although such a charge may be true, in a competitive market the editors cannot be blamed for trying to retain the readers that they already have, or for exploring less widely read forms of literature. In spite of the insights that the literary journals offer in terms of contemporary avant-garde literature, there is a sense that the periodicals could do more to engage readers. Shevelev's request in 2001 for a greater number of reviews and critical articles was echoed by Bandurovsky in 2006. The literary review appears to be one of the areas for which the journals are no longer known: in order to find a review of a new publication, many readers turn to the 'glossies' or to newspapers instead of the literary journals.

A FORUM FOR DEBATE: THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF *NOVYI MIR*, *ZNAMYA* AND *AFISHA*

The literary periodicals have survived a relatively painful transition from the successes of the late Soviet period to the difficulties of the capitalist-style market that started to emerge in the 1990s. The subsequent need for additional funding throughout the 1990s and 2000s has called into question the independence of the medium and has prompted critics to ask whether such money would be better spent on supporting other projects that reach a wider audience. The purpose of this section is to examine whether the general experiences of the literary journals have been replicated on a smaller scale and it will explore the challenges that the new, 'glossy' magazines have presented the journals with. Two 'traditional' literary journals, *Novyi mir* and *Znamya*, will be used as case studies and their experiences will be compared with those of the 'glossy' magazine, *Afisha*. Both *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* are well-established journals based in Moscow, which endured the Soviet era, enjoyed the enormous print runs of the late 1980s and managed to survive the 1990s and 2000s. The reason for choosing two journals based in the country's capital rather than comparing a Moscow-based journal with a provincial journal is relatively simple; there is only one 'traditional' provincial literary journal, *Ural*, still in existence, suggesting that the experiences of the journals in Moscow have been somewhat different from those of journals based in the regions. However, the two 'traditional' journals that comprise this case study appeal to different readerships: *Novyi mir* tends to be viewed as a relatively middle-of-the-road journal, erring on the side of conservative, while *Znamya* has continued along the path envisaged by Sakharov and publishes a 'variety of artistic trends' (Shneidman 1995, p.27). The third case study, the 'glossy' magazine *Afisha*, first published in 1999, is considered one of the 'new breed' of lifestyle magazines, but unlike some of the other popular glossies, it is concerned primarily with culture: literature, film and music.

NOVYI MIR: SOLZHENITSYN'S MOUTHPIECE

Founded in 1925, *Novyi mir* was established as a monthly periodical that published literary fiction and socio-political articles. In spite of being under the control of the Writers' Union of the USSR, its editors were not safe from political persecution for the texts that they chose to publish. In 1937, Ivan Gronskey (1894-1985) was arrested for publishing and defending the writer Boris Pilnyak (1894-1938) and in 1954, the journal's most famous editor, Aleksandr Tvardovsky (1910-1971), was removed, for the first time, from his position as editor-in-chief for allowing the

publication of works by authors such as Vladimir Pomerantsev (1907-1971) and Fedor Abramov (1920-1983). Arguably, the journal's greatest coup was in 1962, when Tvardovsky (who had been reinstated in 1958 and was later removed from his post for the second time in 1970) published Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novella *Odin den Ivana Denisovicha* (1959, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*). The tradition of publishing previously banned or censored works re-emerged during the *glasnost* and *perestroika* era, when Zalygin authorised the publication of Boris Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* (1957 (outside Russia), *Dr Zhivago*), *Kotlovan* (written in 1929-30, *The Foundation Pit*) by Andrei Platonov and George Orwell's *1984* (1949), as well as Solzhenitsyn's works *Arkhipelag gulag* (1973-78, *Gulag Archipelago*), *V krug pervom* (1968, *The First Circle*) and *Rakovyi korpus* (1968, *Cancer Ward*). In 1991, *Novyi mir* became an independent publication that was not directly connected with any artistic union or organisation. However, the inside cover of the journal currently informs readers that it has been produced with the support of the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications and the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography. Since 1998, Andrei Vasilevsky (1955-) has held the position of editor and the journal's 256 pages carry texts and articles under headings such as 'Dnevnik pisatelya' ('*The writer's diary*'), 'Mir iskusstva' ('*The world of art*'), 'Filosofiya. Istoriya. Politika.' ('*Philosophy. History. Politics.*') and 'Literaturnaya kritika' ('*Literary criticism*') (*Zhurnalnyi zal* [n.d.]c). Writers whose works have appeared on the pages of *Novyi mir* have included Sergei Averintsev (1937-2004), Lyudmila Ulitskaya (1943-), Andrei Bitov (1937-) and Dmitrii Bykov (1967-), among others (*Zhurnalnyi zal* [n.d.]c).

ZNAMYA: LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC

Set up under the auspices of the *Literaturnogo obedineniya Krasnoi armii i flota* (LOKAF, *Literary Association of Writers of the Red Army and Navy*) in 1931, *Znamya* publishes literary fiction and socio-political texts. By 1934, *Znamya* had become an organ of the Writers' Union and was considered 'respectable, solid and [...] incredibly dull' (Chuprinin cited in Rebel 2006). In 1986, Grigory Baklanov (1923-2009) became editor-in-chief and 'breathed new life into the journal' (*Znamya* n.d). It was Baklanov who challenged the Writers' Union of the USSR over the journal's independence in 1991 and requested help from the Soros Foundation in 1992. Shneidman suggests that *Znamya* 'promote[s] liberal democratic views and opens [its] pages to a variety of artistic trends' (1995, p.27). *Znamya's* editorial board professes its mission to be an exhibition 'of the achievements of the literary field by publishing not only the well-known masters, but the prose and poetry of

young writers, whom the critics have called the future of Russian literature' (*Znamya* 2001). Since 1993, Sergei Chuprinin (1947-) has edited the journal and appears to have demonstrated support for younger writers, encouraging the publication of Viktor Pelevin's works at the start of Pelevin's publishing career (Anon, personal interview 2007).

AFISHA: A MODERN MAGAZINE FOR A MODERN READERSHIP

In contrast to *Novyi mir* and *Znamya*, *Afisha* was founded in April 1999 comprising ninety-six pages and with the aim of covering 'all kinds of entertainment in Moscow', bills itself as a 'journal for all who want to know about current cinema, music, literature, art and fashion' (*Afisha* [n.d.]). The journalists who write for *Afisha* claim that they publish articles about the things that will be popular tomorrow and, because of *Afisha*, tens of thousands of readers know about new films, books and cultural phenomena, every two weeks (*Afisha* [n.d.]).

Since its launch, *Afisha's* interests have widened. There are now three variations of the journal: one in Moscow, one in St Petersburg and a third for the regions. In addition, the online version attracts more than 1.3 million people, who can access restaurant addresses and cinema listings as well as read reviews and ratings of books and films posted by other visitors to the site. Furthermore, *Afisha* has taken advantage of the growing mobile telephone use in Russia and has developed a service whereby a user can access similar information to that available online for twenty-one cities throughout the country simply by using his or her mobile phone.

THE RISE AND FALL OF NOVYI MIR, ZNAMYA AND AFISHA

The introduction of Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* enabled the literary periodicals to begin publishing in numbers that they could only have imagined. Throughout the second half of the 1980s, the circulation of the periodicals increased year-on-year before reaching a peak in 1990.

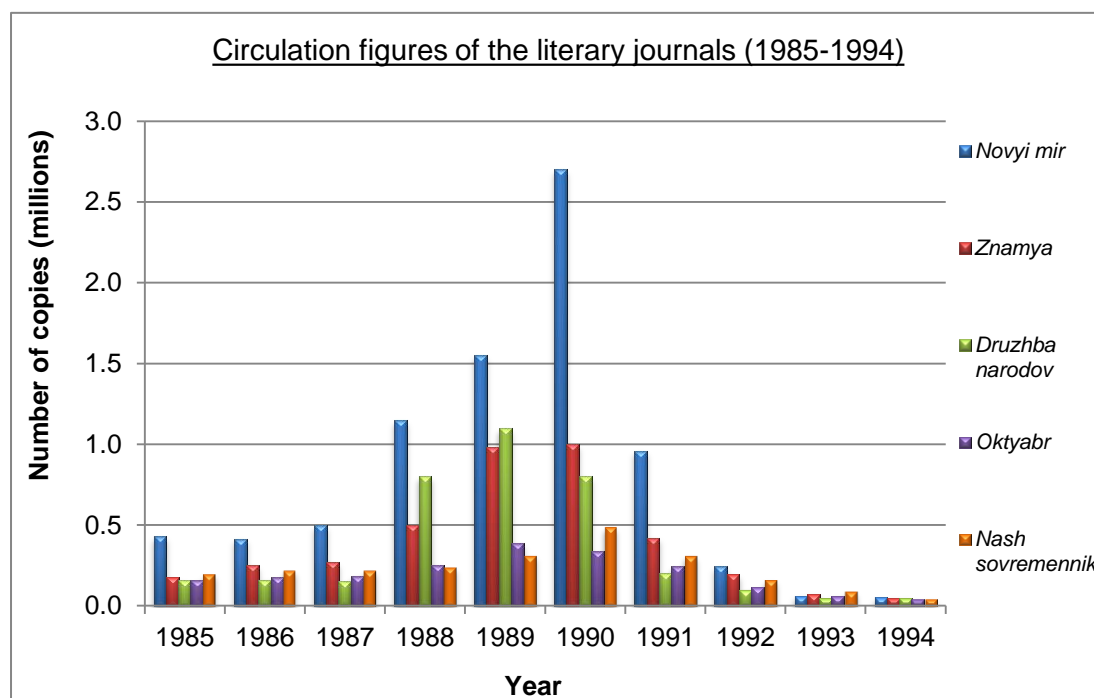


Figure 19: Circulation figures of the literary journals (1985-1994).⁴⁷

In 1990, *Novyi mir* experienced an unprecedented print run of almost 2.7 million copies. *Znamya*, *Oktyabr* and *Nash sovremennik* produced one million copies, 335,000 copies and 448,000 copies respectively. For *Druzhba narodov*, the decrease in print run had already begun, with the journal issuing a print run of 800,000 copies in 1990, 300,000 copies fewer than in 1989. By 1994, the print run of *Novyi mir* had dropped to 53,000 copies, just two per cent of the 1990 peak. The print runs of the other journals had also dropped considerably. *Znamya* reported a

⁴⁷ The figures for the circulation of the literary journals were compiled from the following sources: All journals 1985-93, – (Menzel, 'Writing, Reading and Selling Literature in Russia 1986-2004' (2005, p.41)); *Novyi mir* 1994 – (Latynina and Dewhirst, 'Post-Soviet Russian Literature' (2001, p.235)); *Znamya* 1994 – (Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1988-1994: The End of an Era* (1995, p.27)); *Druzhba narodov* 1994 – (<http://www.svoboda.org/programs/otbl/2005/otbl.012305.asp>); *Oktyabr* 1994 - (Shneidman, *Russian Literature 1995-2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium* (2004, p.25)); *Nash sovremennik* 1994 – ([http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Наш_современник_\(журнал\)](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Наш_современник_(журнал))).

print run of five per cent of their 1990 print run, a total of 48,750 copies, and *Druzhba narodov* and *Oktyabr* fared little better, with the former declaring a print run of 49,000 (six per cent of the 1990 print run) and the latter a print run of 38,200 (eleven per cent of the 1990 total). The fortunes of the literary journals were widely discussed throughout the 1990s and well into the 2000s. Even in 2008, the fates of the literary journals and whether they could survive into the next decade were questioned on the *Kultura* channel and on Russian radio (Telekanal "Kultura" 2008).

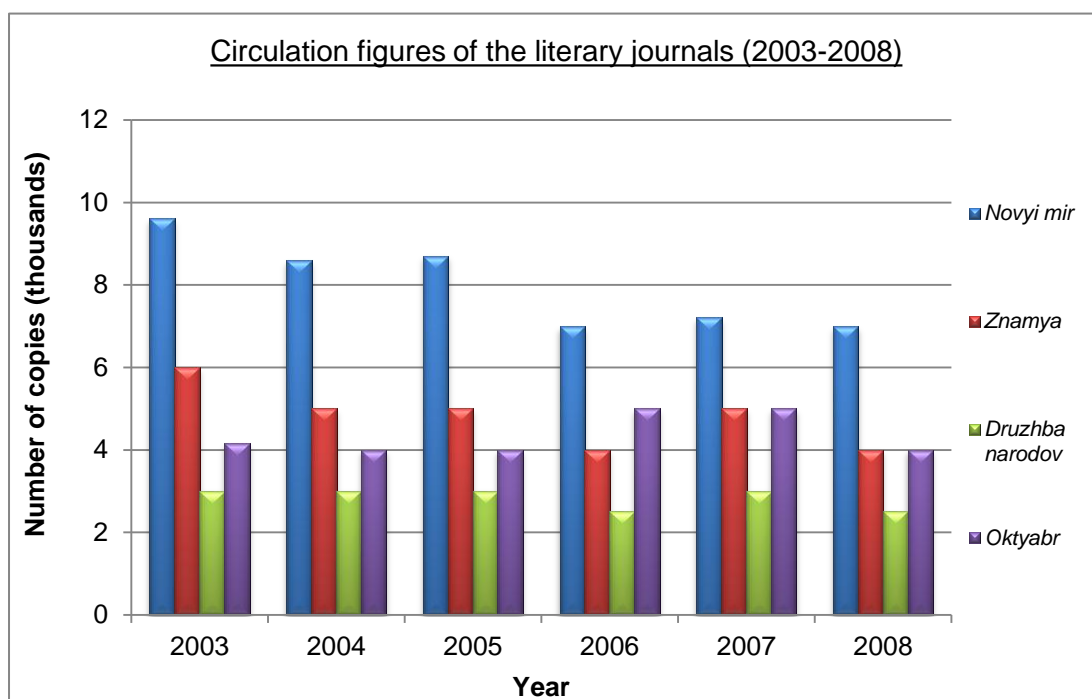


Figure 20: Circulation figures of the literary journals (2003-2008).⁴⁸

Throughout the second half of the 1990s, the print runs for all of the literary journals continued to fall at a significant rate. However, since 2003, there has been much greater stability among the journals and the declining print run appears to have halted. *Novyi mir* has maintained a print run of between seven and nine thousand copies since 2002. *Znamya* and *Oktyabr* reported print runs of between four and

⁴⁸ The figures for the circulation of the literary journals were compiled from the following sources:

Novyi mir 2003 - <http://www.booksite.ru/departament/center/per/world.htm>;
Znamya 2003 - <http://www.amic.ru/news/20640/&dd=11&mm=6&yy=2003>;
Druzhba narodov 2003 - <http://www.booksite.ru/departament/center/per/friendship.htm>;
Oktyabr 2003 - <http://www.booksite.ru/departament/center/per/october.htm>;
all journals 2004 - <http://city-2.narod.ru/vs/p10.html>;
Novyi mir and *Znamya* 2005 - <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/otbl/2005/otbl.012305.asp>;
Druzhba narodov and *Oktyabr* 2005 - http://exlibris.ng.ru/fakty/2005-01-27/1_vasilevsky.html;
all journals 2006 - <http://stalinpravda.narod.ru/fan859.html>;
all journals 2007 - http://www.litkarta.ru/dossier/mimo-rynka/view_print/;
all journals 2008 - <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2008/55/19.html>.

five thousand copies for the same period and *Druzhba narodov* has continued to survive even though its average print run has been as low as 2,500 copies in recent years.

In contrast to the falling print runs of the literary journals, 'glossy' magazine *Afisha* has reported a relatively high print run throughout the 2000s. In 2005, the magazine's print run was at least 124,860 copies, rising to 325,600 copies in 2006.⁴⁹ Since 2006, *Afisha* has been owned by Prof Media and although figures for *Afisha* from 2007 and 2008 are not available, the Prof Media website suggests that there is a total print run of 265,000 copies (Prof Media Holdings 2009), which reaches around 1 million readers (*Afisha* [n.d.]). Irrespective of the lack of concrete figures, there is no doubt that *Afisha*'s print run is significantly higher than those of *Novyi mir* and *Znamya*.

Although the literary periodicals' print runs of the mid-2000s are incomparable with those of 1989 and 1990, editors are positive about the numbers of copies that they currently produce; pointing out that the average print run for a book has also been in decline in recent years (Vasilevsky cited in Voznesensky 2005). In 2007, the average print run for a book was little over 6,000 copies per title. Therefore, a print run of between five and seven thousand for a journal which is published twelve times a year is both a figure of which to be proud and, more importantly, is a figure that is sustainable.

⁴⁹ In 2005, *Afisha* Industries published five magazines with a combined print run of 624,300 copies. In order to obtain an indication of *Afisha*'s 2005 print run, I have assumed that each of these publications was printed in the same volumes, although, the 2006 print run suggests that an estimate of 124,860 copies is a relatively conservative estimate.

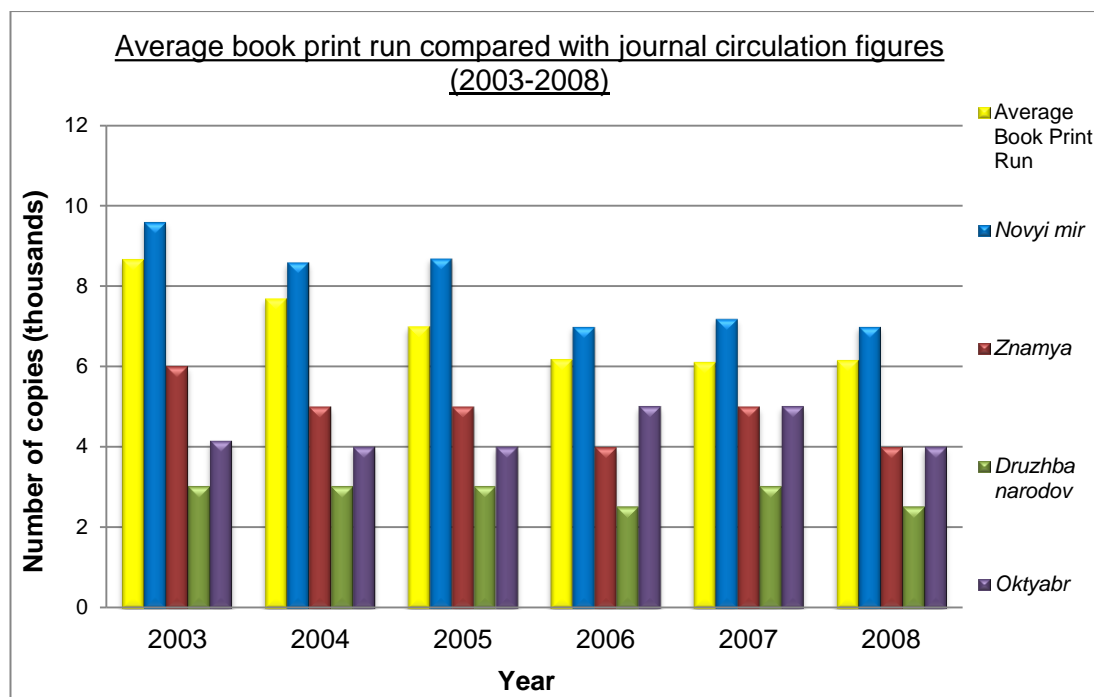


Figure 21: Average book print run compared journal circulation figures (2003-2008).

Arguably, a lower print run is more sustainable and is better for the long-term planning of the journals in terms of costs. In contrast to the mid-1990s, when subscription levels in the first six months of the year varied wildly from the second six months of the year, it appears that the number of readers subscribing in the 2000s have remained more or less constant throughout the year. In January 1996, *Novyi mir* had a print run of 30,200 copies, but by July of the same year, the figure was 20,570 copies (Latynina and Dewhirst 2001, p.235). The same was true for *Druzhba narodov*, which experienced a print run high of 15,000 and a print run low of 11,000, also in 1996 (Anninsky 1999).

It could be argued that the stabilisation of the journals' print run at between 2,500 and 8,000 copies, depending on the journal, is a form of 'normalisation'. The average print run of a single book title has gradually fallen throughout the 1990s and 2000s, thus a similar print run for a literary journal that prints 'elite' rather than 'mass' literature is something of a commercial success. Vasilevsky (cited in Voznesensky 2005) suggests that it is time to stop comparing the phenomenal print runs of the late 1980s and early 1990s with those of today and instead consider the impressive fact that, in spite of the negative predictions made after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the literary periodicals are still in existence and that they are still, with varying degrees of support, commercially viable.

Measuring the impact that the state's policies have on the literary journals is difficult. The journals' support from the Federal Agency of Press and Mass Communications and the Federal Agency of Culture and Cinematography', may suggest that printing texts that do not support the government's ideas regarding 'priority national projects' and the official line that accompanies these projects might be, at the very least, ill-advised. It has been suggested that writers who receive funds from the state are unlikely to criticise the government or its practices (Anon, personal interview 2007), therefore it is not unrealistic to suggest that journals may be reluctant to produce texts that the state does not like, particularly if the consequences are such that the same fate might befall other journals as that which ended *21st-Century Volga's* publication. In addition, changes to the provision of state support could be viewed as a form of censorship. The state decides which projects are 'socially significant' and any applications that are not compatible with the state's view are rejected. In contrast to the literary periodicals, *Afisha* does not require a state subsidy in order to publish its bi-weekly magazine, which raises questions about whether it is more independent than the literary periodicals and may suggest that any influence that it has over readers' book choices is not motivated by financial considerations.

REVIEWING LITERATURE: WHAT ARE READERS ENCOURAGED TO READ?

It has been argued that one of the journals' key functions is to offer the readers beyond the Moscow ring road an impression of the contemporary literary scene and to publish works that are of interest to an educated readership. In addition, the journals aim to inform their readers about the publication and content of other texts which have been released by Russian publishers. Throughout the 1990s, accusations were levelled at the journals that they had all but abandoned contemporary prose (Shneidman 1995), yet the suggestion that the journals have neglected contemporary literature appears to be unfounded in the 2000s. Before examining the texts that the journals have reviewed since 1997, an exploration of the numbers of reviews and the numbers of subjects that have been reviewed seems necessary, if only to highlight how these figures have changed and to offer a point of comparison with the 'glossy' magazine *Afisha*.

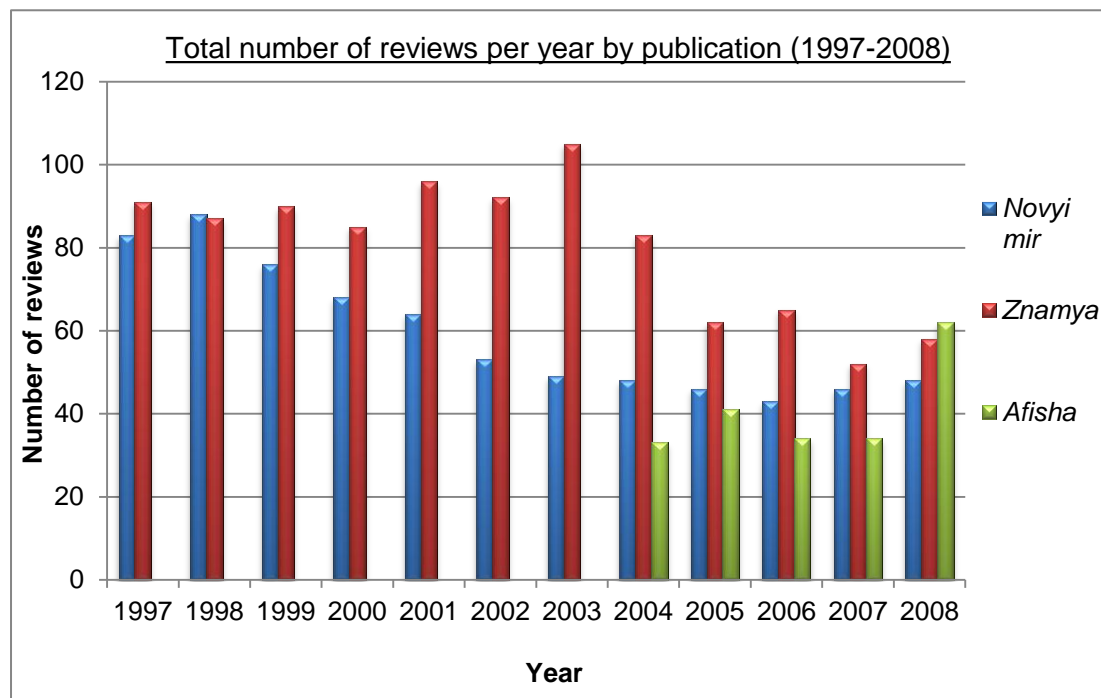


Figure 22: Total number of reviews per year by publication (1997-2008).⁵⁰

Between 1997 and 2008 there has been an overall decline in the number of reviews that the literary periodicals have published. The number of reviews published by *Novyi mir* has almost halved, falling from eighty-three reviews in 1997 to forty-eight reviews in 2008, and the number of reviews has remained below fifty per year from 2003, falling to a low of forty-three reviews in 2006. *Znamya* has also demonstrated an overall downward trend in the number of reviews that the journal publishes on an annual basis, publishing ninety-one reviews in 1997, compared with fifty-eight in 2008. Yet, in contrast to *Novyi mir*, which exhibited a year-on-year decline in the number of reviews published between 1997 and 2006, the number of reviews in *Znamya* increased to 105 reviews in 2003 before starting to fall. Perhaps it is unsurprising that *Afisha* has traditionally published fewer reviews per year than *Novyi mir* and *Znamya*. Yet *Afisha* published significantly more reviews in 2008 than in 2007: sixty-two reviews compared with thirty-four reviews.⁵¹ In contrast, *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* increased the number of reviews that they published by two and six respectively and fell behind *Afisha* for the total number of reviews published in 2008. It is not immediately clear whether the book reviews published by *Afisha* have taken the place of reviews about other cultural areas. The areas that are being reviewed

⁵⁰ All figures compiled by the author.

⁵¹ There is no immediately obvious reason for this reversal in the number of texts surveyed; however the number of titles published in Russia increased, so it may be that the number of reviews reflects this increase.

have changed between 2004 and 2008, for example, CD reviews have been replaced with music reviews and the review of computer games has become a regular feature on *Afisha*'s pages. It is, however, hard to identify what the journal is now choosing to omit and the number of book reviews that have been published suggests that there is audience interest in the subject. Of course, it should be noted that *Afisha* is issued fortnightly, rather than on a monthly basis, in theory permitting a greater number of texts to be reviewed each month, although the journal has fewer pages than *Novyi mir*.

Although the number of reviews has decreased throughout the 2000s, there have been changes in editorial policy that may account for this decline. The editorial board for *Znamya* has made a minor change in the review process, whereby the first and seventh editions of the journal each year do not contain any reviews. This change occurred in 2004 and provides an explanation for the decrease in the total number of reviews since the 2003 peak. A more significant change to the way in which the journals produce reviews can be seen in *Novyi mir*. Since 2001, *Novyi mir* has introduced *Knizhnaya polka* (*The Bookshelf*), *Kinoobozrenie* (*Film Review*) and *www-Obozrenie* (*www-Review*). *Knizhnaya polka* allows one reviewer the opportunity to offer his or her opinions on a variety of texts that they have selected to form works on his or her 'bookshelf'. *Kinoobozrenie* and *www-Obozrenie* are relatively self-explanatory; they offer reviews of films and the availability of literature online. In addition to these reviews, *Novyi mir* has introduced reviews of audio books and theatre reviews. The significance of *Knizhnaya polka*, *Kinoobozrenie* and *www-Obozrenie* as well as *Zvuchashchaya literatura* (*Audio Literature*) and *teatralnye vpechatleniya* (*Theatre Impressions*) is that they are an attempt by the journals to diversify and cover a wider range of subjects that might interest the readership.⁵² This expansion into the review of other cultural forms clearly replicates the ideas of the 'glossies', where the emphasis is not solely on literature. This diversification is also replicated in the subjects that are reviewed by each of the publications.

⁵² The *Times Literary Supplement* also devotes some of its pages to subjects other than literature, asserting that it 'is the only literary weekly – in fact the only journal – to offer comprehensive coverage not just of the latest and most important publications, in every subject, in several languages – but also current theatre, opera, exhibitions and film' (n.d.).

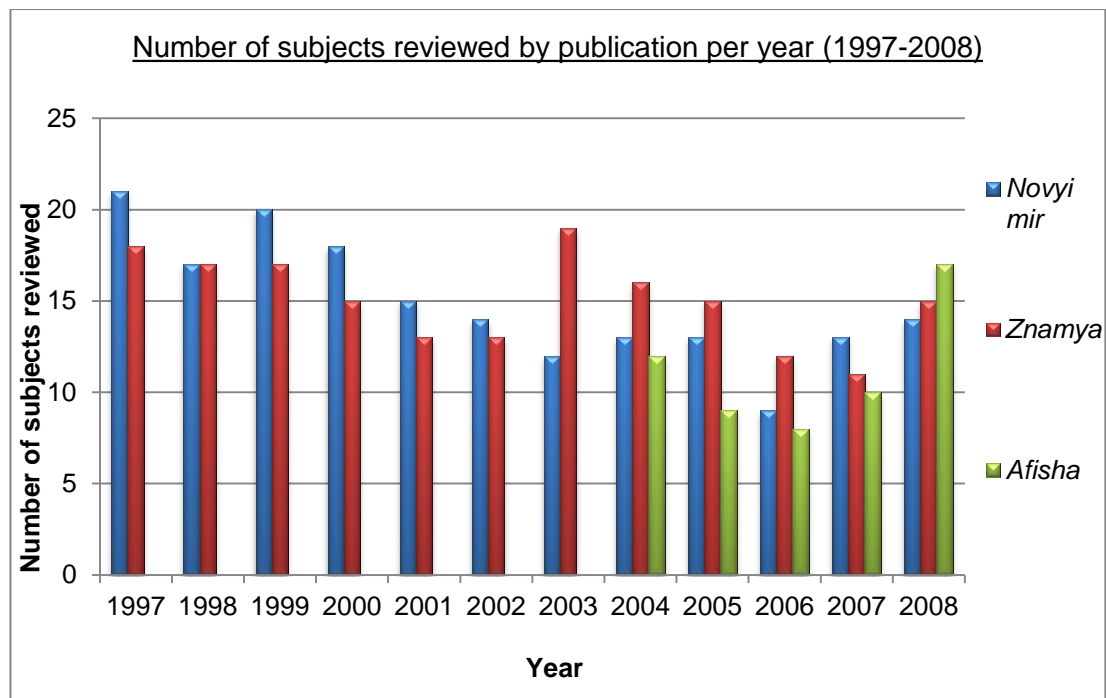


Figure 23: Number of subjects reviewed by publication per year (1997-2008).⁵³

In general, the number of subjects reviewed per year varies according to the total number of reviews that the journal has published. In spite of publishing fewer reviews per year than *Znamya*, prior to 2003 *Novyi mir* published reviews on a greater number of subjects, suggesting that the journal was attempting to replicate the growing diversity in the book market by offering opinions on texts that might appeal to their ‘traditional’ readership, but that might not fall under the heading ‘serious literature’ that the journals conventionally prefer to review. However, since *Znamya*’s decision to omit literary reviews in the first and seventh editions of the journal, the number of subjects that they have reviewed has been greater than the number reviewed by *Novyi mir*. Although *Afisha* had consistently reviewed fewer subjects than both of the literary periodicals, this was reversed in 2008 when the magazine reviewed a wider variety of subjects than either *Novyi mir* or *Znamya*. In spite of an increase in the number of subjects reviewed in the last few years, the most widely reviewed subjects are easily identified, although the rankings vary slightly according to publication.

Between 2004 and 2008, prose was the most widely reviewed type of text, with *Novyi mir* and *Afisha* printing a total of sixty reviews and seventy-eight reviews

⁵³ All figures compiled by the author.

respectively.⁵⁴ Although *Znamya* also reviewed a large number of prose works, seventy-five in total, the journal printed more reviews of poetry than any other subject between 2004 and 2008, seventy-seven reviews in total. Poetry was also widely reviewed by *Novyi mir*, occupying second place among the ten most widely reviewed subjects. Perhaps this is not surprising given the special place of poetry in Russia, something which these figures appear to confirm. In contrast, *Afisha* published just a single poetry review in the same period.

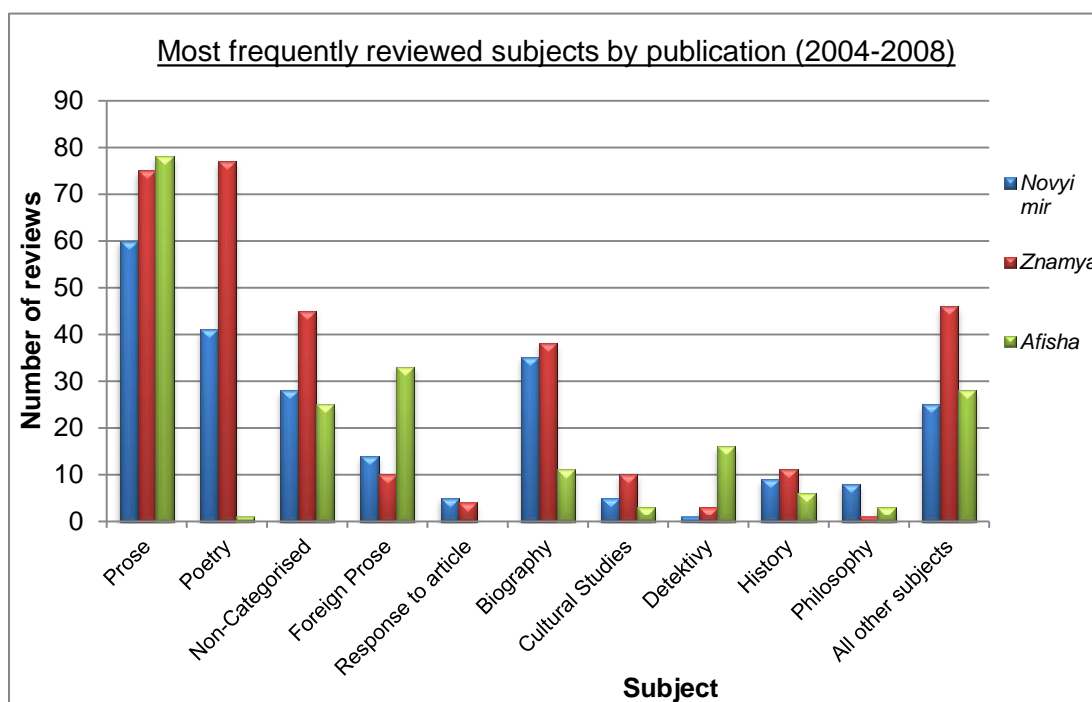


Figure 24: Most frequently reviewed subjects by publication (2004-2008).⁵⁵

In addition to reviewing greater numbers of poetry texts, *Znamya* and *Novyi mir* published more reviews of biographies and more responses to texts produced in other literary publications than *Afisha*. In contrast, the greatest number of reviews of foreign prose and *detektivy* were published by *Afisha*, with thirty-three and sixteen reviews respectively, compared to *Znamya*'s ten foreign prose and three *detektivy* reviews and *Novyi mir*'s fourteen reviews for the former and one for the latter. All three publications issued a similar number of reviews on history, philosophy and cultural studies. Although the overall trends may be similar, the percentages of reviews by subject issued by each publication show some variation.

⁵⁴ In order to offer an accurate comparison between all three publications, data regarding the top ten most reviewed subjects is drawn only from the 2004-2008 period.

⁵⁵ All figures compiled by the author.

As a percentage of the total number of reviews according to the top ten subjects, *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* demonstrate comparatively similar patterns. Both journals dedicated around twenty-five per cent of their reviews between 2004 and 2008 to prose subjects, a figure which *Znamya* matched with the number of poetry reviews. At the opposite end of the top ten, both *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* each devoted less than twenty per cent of the total of the top ten subjects reviewed to six subjects: philosophy; cultural studies; history; *detektivy*; foreign prose and responses to texts published in other journals, devoting eighteen per cent and eleven per cent of their total number of reviews respectively.

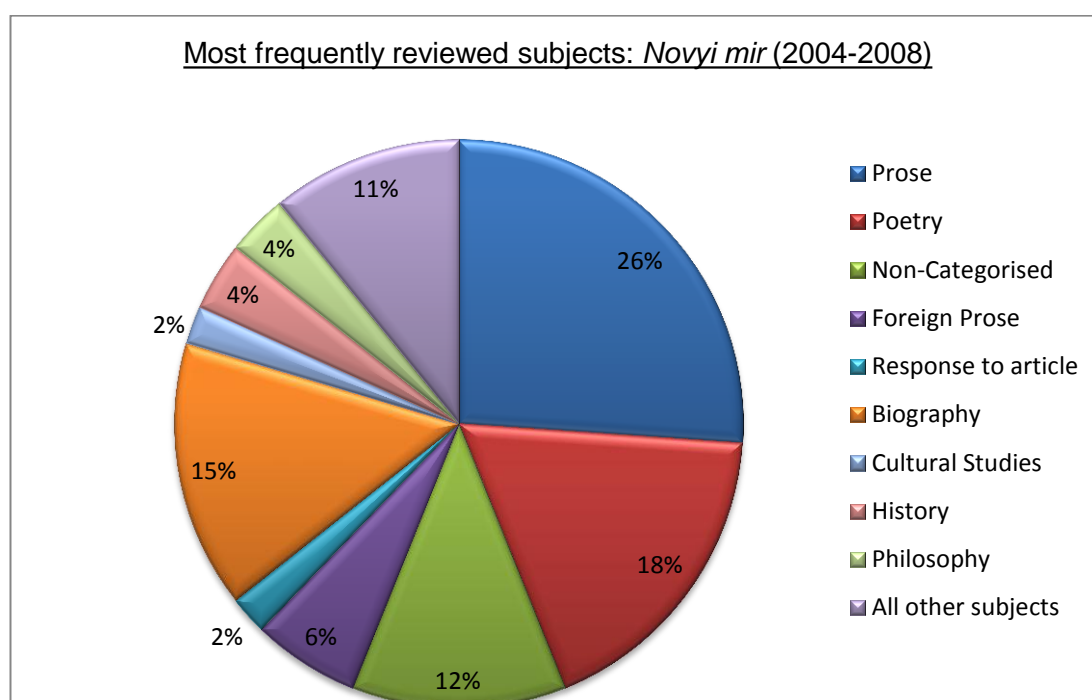


Figure 25: Most frequently reviewed subjects: *Novyi mir* (2004-2008).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ All figures compiled by the author.

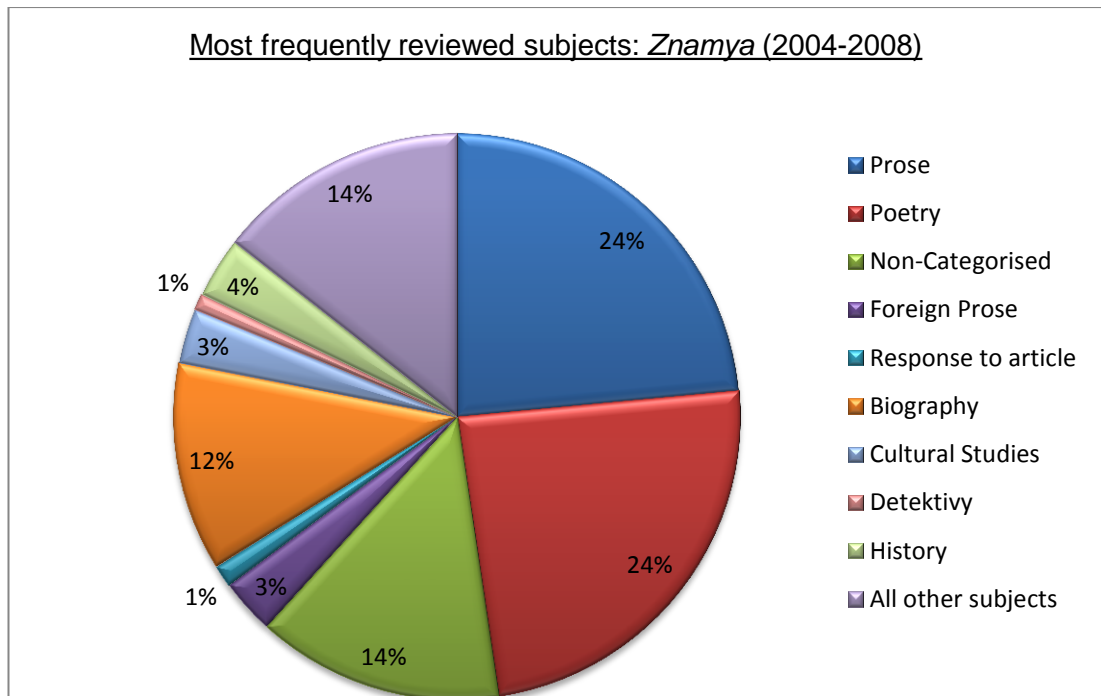


Figure 26: Most frequently reviewed subjects: *Znamya* (2004-2008).⁵⁷

Conversely, *Afisha* dedicated sixteen per cent of its reviews to foreign prose, eight per cent of the top ten subject reviews covered *detektivy* and thirty-eight per cent of the reviews fell in the prose category. However, the least reviewed top ten subjects in *Afisha* offer some comparison with the literary periodicals, with philosophy, cultural studies, responses to other publications and history comprising just five per cent of the top ten subjects reviewed.

⁵⁷ All figures compiled by the author.

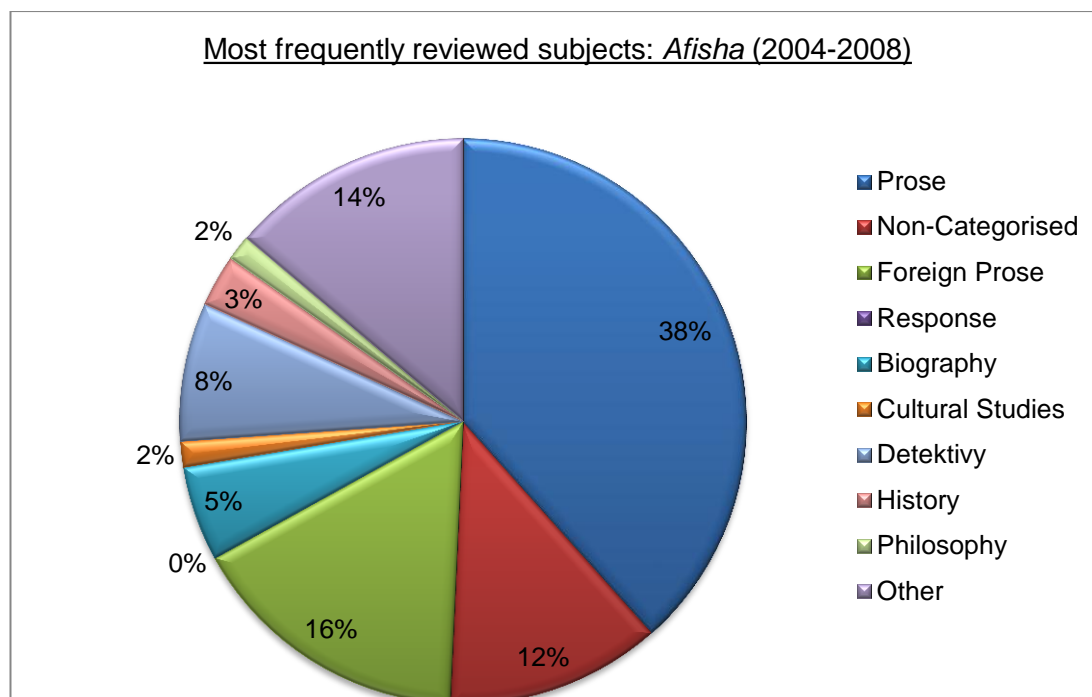


Figure 27: Most frequently reviewed subjects: *Afisha* (2004-2008).⁵⁸

Despite the apparently similar trends demonstrated by the literary periodicals regarding the top ten subjects reviewed, greater analysis of the results over a longer period of time (1997-2008) reveals some interesting differences both in the individual publications' top ten most widely reviewed subjects and in frequency of reviews by subject. One of the key points to observe when examining the individual publications' most frequently reviewed subjects by year is the variation in what comprises these subjects. Although all three publications review prose, biographies and foreign prose, neither fantasy nor *detektivy* feature among the literary periodicals' most regularly reviewed subjects. *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* both review history, cultural studies and poetry and print responses to publications in other journals, although neither religion nor philosophy are among *Znamya*'s top ten, replaced instead by reviews of music or academic publications.

When considering the numbers of reviews by subject, it is clear that there are far greater fluctuations in the number of reviews published in *Novyi mir* than in either *Znamya* or *Afisha*. It appears that prose reviews are sacrificed at the expense of the other subjects reviewed. For example, in 2006, there is a sharp decline in the number of prose reviews, down from fifteen reviews in 2005, to nine in 2006. However, there is an increase in the number of reviews covering biographies,

⁵⁸ All figures compiled by the author.

history, poetry and non-categorised texts. In spite of a decrease in the total number of reviews, the diversity of the material that is being reviewed is not being compromised; the editorial board chooses to review a larger or smaller number of prose texts rather than reviewing a proportionally lower number of all types of text.

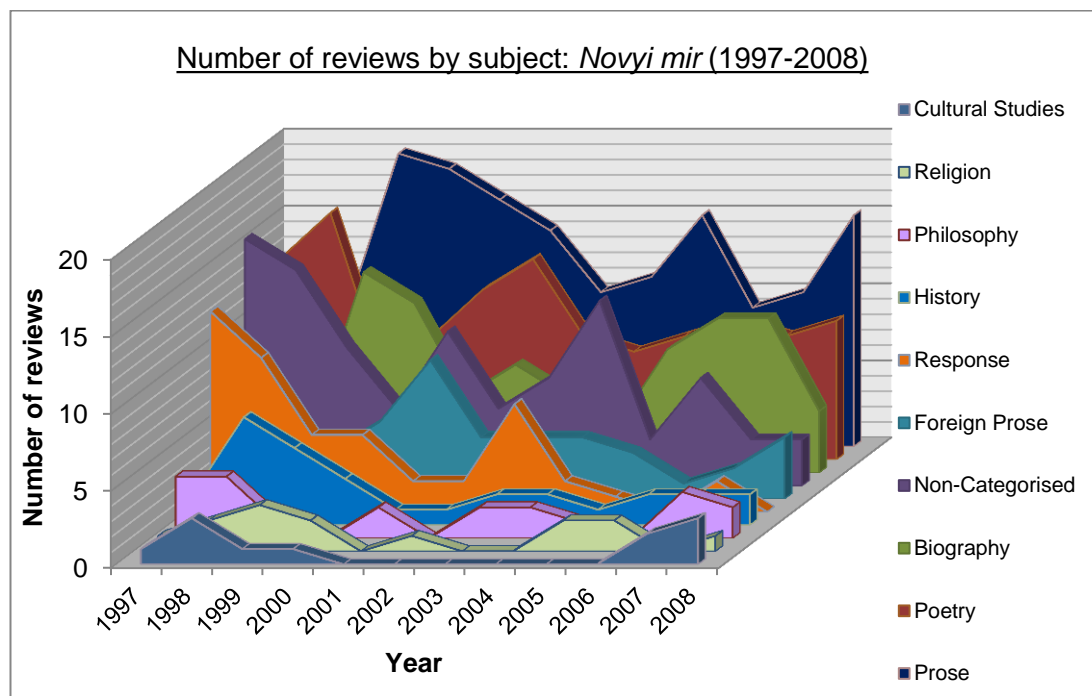


Figure 28: Number of reviews by subject: *Novyi mir* (1997-2008).⁵⁹

Unlike *Novyi mir*, the proportion of reviews by subject that *Znamya* publishes remains relatively constant; when the total number of reviews increases or decreases, the top-ten subjects follow the same pattern. Arguably, both journals have found a method by which the diversity of the material that is reviewed can be preserved, with *Znamya* preferring to retain a similar proportion of each subject per total number of reviews and *Novyi mir* choosing to increase or decrease the number of prose texts depending on the number of texts on other subjects that are being reviewed.

⁵⁹ All figures compiled by the author.

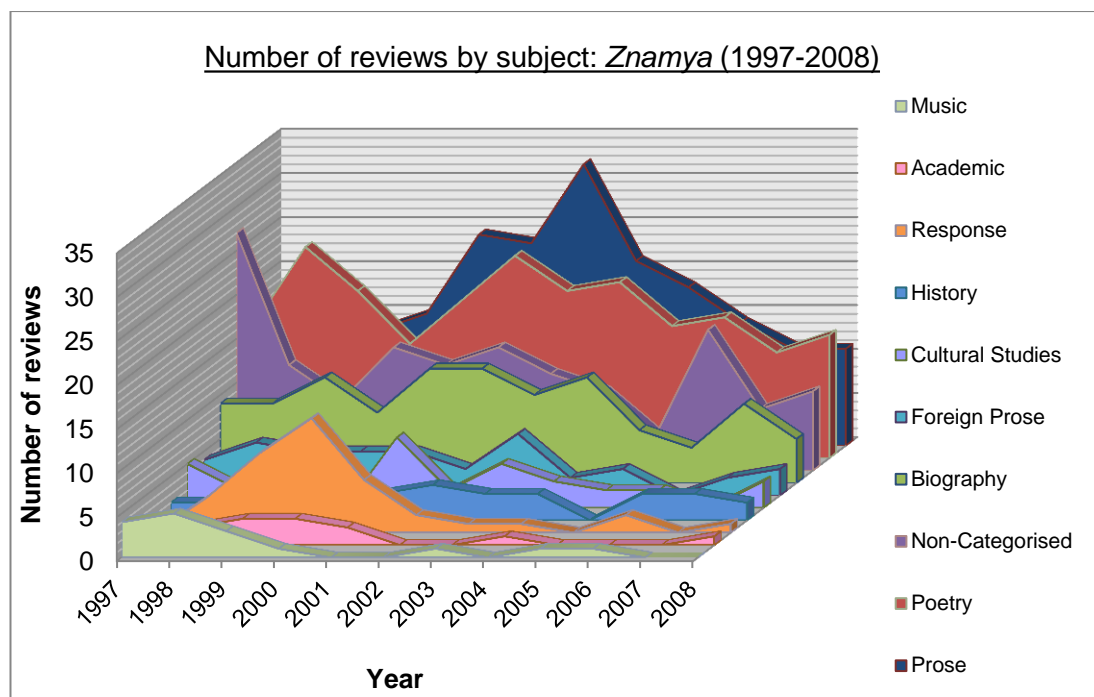


Figure 29: Number of reviews by subject: *Znamya* (1997-2008).⁶⁰

In comparison to the literary periodicals' top ten most frequently reviewed subjects, *Afisha* reviews a more limited range of subjects.

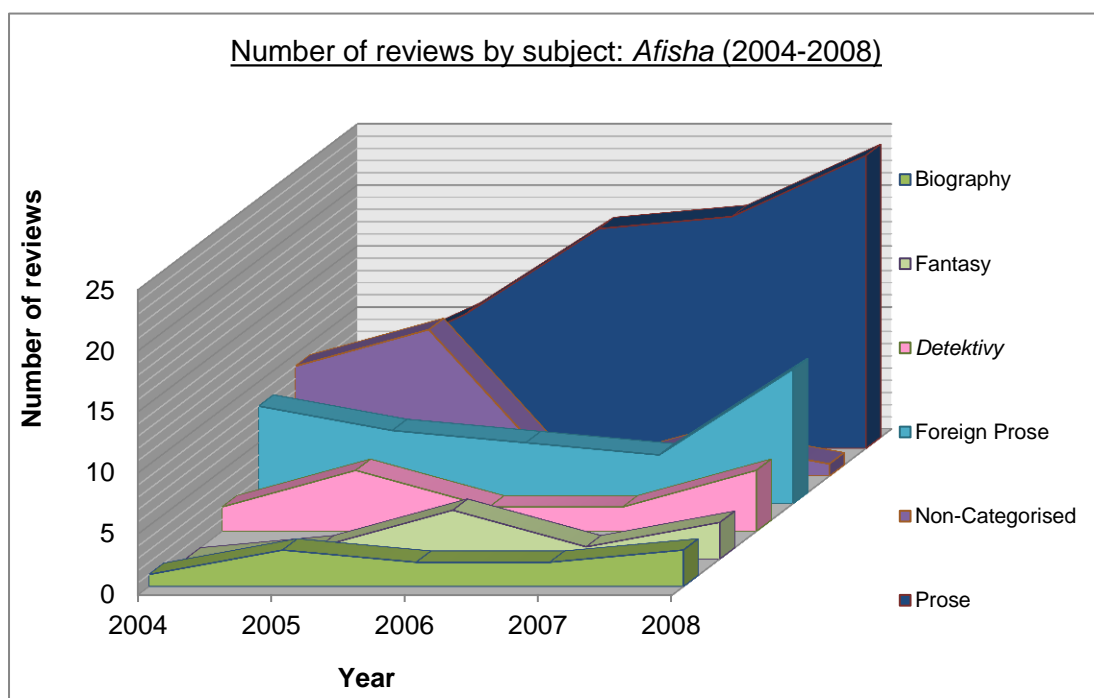


Figure 30: Number of reviews by subject: *Afisha* (2004-2008).⁶¹

⁶⁰ All figures compiled by the author.

⁶¹ All figures compiled by the author.

Just as prose is the most widely reviewed subject for *Znamya* and *Novyi mir* between 1997 and 2008, so too was it the most reviewed subject in *Afisha* between 2004 and 2008. In contrast to *Novyi mir*, and to some extent *Znamya*, *Afisha* demonstrates a much more stable rate of reviews according to subject. The relatively stable numbers of reviews per subject suggest that *Afisha*'s editorial board is aware of the types of texts that the magazine's readers enjoy and is therefore inclined to review those works on a regular basis.

Within the top ten most frequently reviewed subjects there are differences according to sub-genre. The pattern of reviews according to sub-genre is broadly similar for all three publications: contemporary men's prose (written by male Russian authors living in Russia) is the most widely reviewed sub-genre and prose written prior to 1991, the least reviewed.⁶² The number of reviews of women's post-1991 prose (written by female Russian authors living in Russia) is around a quarter of the number of men's post-1991 prose reviews and in the cases of *Novyi mir* and *Afisha* women's contemporary prose is reviewed less regularly than both foreign prose texts and non-categorised prose (including those defined as fantasy, as *detektivy* or as Russian literature). Only prose written before 1991 is reviewed less often than women's contemporary prose.

⁶² These figures are comparable with reviews in the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*, each of which publish more reviews of books written by men than they do of those written by women. See Page 'Research shows male writers still dominate books world' (2011) for further details of the focus of reviews in these publications.

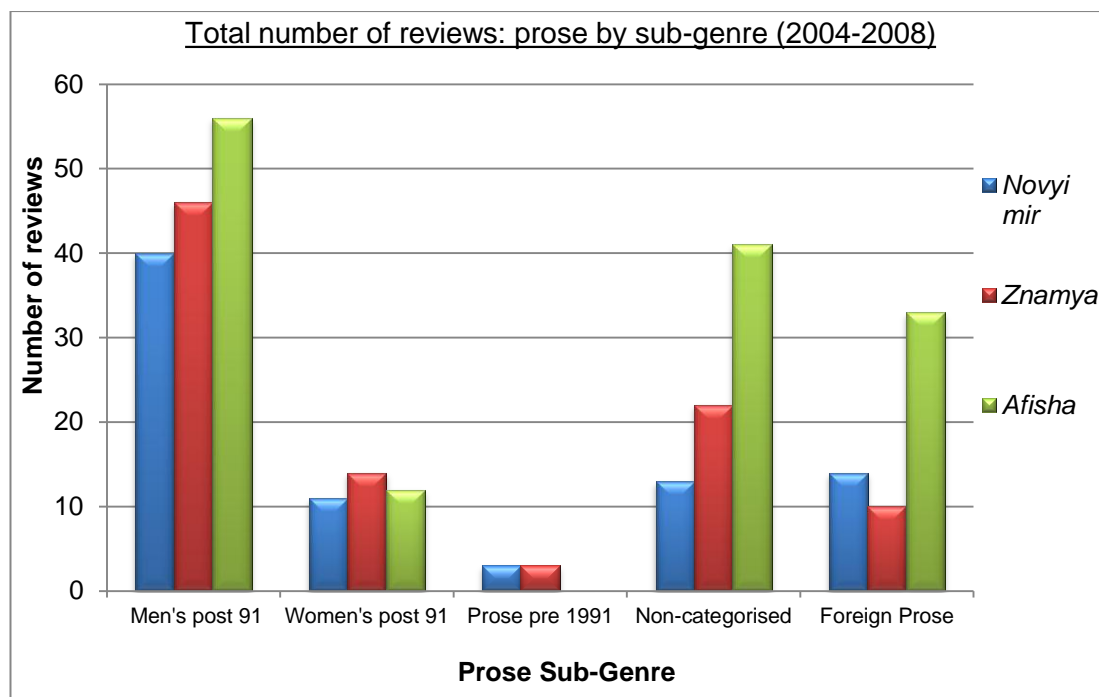


Figure 31: Total number of reviews by sub-genre (2004-2008).⁶³

The frequency with which contemporary men's prose is reviewed by the literary periodicals may call into question Dubin's assessment that these journals preferred to discuss classic texts and well-known writers. The number of reviews of contemporary men's prose in *Novyi mir* has fluctuated, rising from two reviews in 1997 and 1998 to twelve reviews in 2008, suggesting a shift away from the more traditionally reviewed texts. Such an assumption is reinforced by the decline in the number of pre-1991 prose texts that are being reviewed by *Novyi mir*: none has been reviewed since 2005. *Znamya* has demonstrated a similar trend in the number of prose texts written before 1991, reviewing just a single work since 2004. Perhaps it is not surprising that *Afisha* has not reviewed any pre-1991 prose texts, preferring to focus on contemporary men's prose and foreign prose. There has been a shift in the number of reviews that *Afisha* has dedicated to these two sub-genres. In 2004, foreign prose was reviewed more frequently than contemporary men's prose. However, as the number of reviews of contemporary men's prose increased, the number of foreign prose texts reviewed declined, until 2008, when both sub-genres showed an increase in line with an overall growth in the total number of reviews published by *Afisha*.

⁶³ All figures compiled by the author.

Conclusions

The experiences of the journals demonstrate that the changing functions of literature have had notably different impacts on the publications, depending on their classification, either as 'traditional' literary periodical or new 'glossy' magazine. The declining print run of the literary journals when compared with the growing success of the new 'glossies' emphasises the commercial significance that literature has acquired since the mid-1990s, with the traditional periodicals struggling to adapt their model to a world in which culture is no longer exempt from the vagaries of the market and financial accountability is demanded by those who have an interest in the success or failure of a publication. However, the fact that the market is able to sustain both the 'thick' journals and the 'glossies' may be due in part to the different reasons people have for reading. Dennis Dillon suggests that 'some of the commonly given reasons for why people read are: enjoyment; learning; utility; and contemplation' (2001, p.122) and it seems that the journals and magazines target these different reasons. The 'thick' journals are much more concerned with contemplation and learning, they believe that their readers turn to them to find out about the current literary scene. In contrast, *Afisha*'s editors understand that their readership is much more likely to be concerned with enjoyment, which is reflected in the texts that they review. Furthermore, reading is often a social activity – people discuss the books that they have read and make recommendations to others. Arguably, the journals and the 'glossies' are simply engaging in this activity, albeit on a less personal level. However, the reader is often keen to hear 'the professional' assessment of a text, either to decide what he or she should read next, or to see to what extent the critical review of a text matches up to his or her own.

The way in which the publications used as case studies each review and discuss texts that have appeared on Russia's literary scene reveal some unexpected patterns. Although *Afisha*'s decision to focus on the review of contemporary prose may not be surprising, the fact that this publication published more reviews in 2008 than both *Novyi mir* and *Znamya*, suggests that the Russian reading public continues to be interested in books. In addition, the assertion by the literary journals that their primary readership tends to be located in the provincial regions of Russia and is thus more conservative than the Moscow and St Petersburg-based readership cannot be considered an entirely plausible reason for reviewing serious, non-commercial texts over popular works. *Afisha* also has a substantial following in the provinces and does not appear to alter the texts that it reviews on the basis that its readers in the regions will abandon it if they do not like the literature it discusses.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the commercialisation of literature, which has undoubtedly forced the once-popular literary journals to the margins of Russia's literary scene, the free market has enabled *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* to continue publishing and the stabilisation of their circulation figures over the past five years suggests that there is a core readership which will sustain the periodicals, at least in the short term. The fact that the literary periodicals are still in existence demonstrates the importance that literature of every sort continues to play in Russia and the ability of the periodicals to rival the average book print run further emphasises the value that the reading public places on the traditional forums for debate. The inclusion of literary reviews and discussions regarding literature in the new 'glossy' magazines of the 2000s reinforces literature's significance to every generation of Russian readers.

Although the literary periodicals have managed to survive the challenges that a capitalist market brings with it, the current criteria surrounding the qualifications for state support raise questions regarding the independence of the publications that receive help and the treatment of *21st-Century Volga's* editorial board elicits further concern. Recent changes that allow funding only for those projects deemed 'socially significant' appear to contradict the legal requirement that the Russian public has free and easy access to all Russian print media.

As regards the discussion of literature by the periodicals, it appears that the editorial boards persist in their attitude that it is their role to inform the wider population of events taking place on the literary scene and to link the provincial areas of Russia with the literary centres. The decision to publish a free, online version of the periodicals demonstrates their commitment to providing information about contemporary literature to any reader to whom it is of interest. In the mid-1990s, the journals were accused of ignoring contemporary prose and poetry, a complaint that appears relatively unfounded in the 2000s. This change in the type of text reviewed, combined with the decision to review film and theatre, suggests that the periodicals are trying hard to appeal to the contemporary reader. Although *Novyi mir* and *Znamya* maintain their position regarding 'serious, non-commercial' texts and tend to avoid reviewing 'popular' texts, the commercial and literary significance of these works is emphasised by the frequency with which the 'glossies' do review these types of books. In spite of the difficulties that the literary periodicals have endured throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, their continued existence suggests there is a

fundamental group of people who remain interested in the opinions that the journals publish. In addition, the 'glossy' magazines recognise the role that literature continues to play and review a selection of new texts according to the interests of their readers.

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICS AND LITERATURE

It is impossible to explore the post-Soviet function of literature without considering the relationship between political power in Russia and the literature that is produced. With the disintegration of the Soviet administration, it seemed that there would no longer be a need for literature to engage with politics or for the political authorities in a so-called democratic state to use literature as a means of exerting influence over the population. However, changes to the ownership and regulation of television channels and national newspapers during the Putin era have prompted some commentators to suggest that literature has again become one of the only arenas in which opinions that are contrary to those approved by the state can be heard.

The aim of this chapter is not to investigate whether there has been a re-politicisation of literature since 2000; there is no question that Putin has received far greater attention from writers than Yeltsin ever did. Rather this chapter will explore why there has been an increase in literary fiction concerned with political issues and politicians, specifically Putin, and what messages these works are hoping to convey. In addition, this chapter will examine whether there are any similarities between the political literature of the Soviet period and of that published in the 2000s. In order to explore the re-politicisation of literature, this chapter will analyse two plays, *Putin.doc* (2005) and *Preemnik.doc* (2007), by Viktor Teterin, five fairy stories from Dmitrii Bykov's collection *Kak Putin stal prezidentom SShA* (*How Putin Became the President of the USA* 2005) and a sample of Maksim Kononenko's vignettes from his website www.vladimir.vladimirovich.ru (2002-2008).

THE SOVIET IMAGE OF THE LEADER

The esteem with which Russians regard the leaders of their nation is not a new phenomenon and successive leaders have enjoyed the population's respect and adulation. The expressions of devotion have varied depending on the leader and the situation in which the population has found itself under his command. There is no question that some leaders apparently enjoyed immense popularity even when their actions have been reprehensible. The image of the leader is particularly important when considering the Soviet period. Stalin's cult of personality was a significant period in Soviet history and Khrushchev's subsequent denunciation of the Stalin cult was particularly pertinent as it signalled the beginning of repeated reassessments of personality cults. The re-politicisation of literature, particularly when viewed in conjunction with various other events, such as the state's increasing control of the media, has prompted some observers to express their concerns about the emergence of a Putin cult of personality.

THE CULT OF PERSONALITY

Although the majority of the Soviet leaders enjoyed popularity and were at the centre of their own cults of personality, the cult which grew around Lenin was the most significant of the Soviet era. During his life Lenin was the reluctant recipient of veneration for the role that he played in bringing about the Revolution and whilst he 'ascribe[d] great importance to the role of the leaders and organizers of the masses, [at] the same time [he] mercilessly stigmatized every manifestation of the cult of the individual' (Khrushchev 1956). Lenin's cult was encouraged after his death by Stalin who wished to be revered in the same way that Lenin had. In Stalin's mind, Lenin might not have managed to fulfil his revolutionary plans, so he, Stalin, would carry them out and as a result, he believed that he deserved the same admiration that Lenin had enjoyed. Lenin's cult served a further purpose; it provided legitimacy for the Soviet leaders' actions: the pursuit of Leninism. Importantly, the cult of Lenin was a phenomenon that essentially emerged posthumously. In contrast to Lenin and his dislike of adulation from the masses, Stalin's promoters 'manipulated a quasi-religious iconography to lend his persona a near sacred character' (Brooks 2000, p.xvi). Following Stalin, Khrushchev clearly had much to say about personality cults. Yet by dismantling Stalin's cult, he contributed to the creation of his own cult, which he did not discourage. However, the scale of Khrushchev's cult was in no way comparable to that of Lenin or Stalin and it may have seemed that the era of the Soviet leaders' personality cults was waning. This notion was reinforced by the

comparably small personality cult that grew around Brezhnev. His memoirs and his use of the title *vozhd* (leader), previously used by Stalin, commanded neither fear nor respect and resulted in jokes at his expense and widespread ridicule. Even in the later Soviet period Gorbachev had his followers, yet the impact of his *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies on the 'ordinary' people was so extreme that any cult that had been developing soon lost its momentum and he was celebrated more widely in the West than in the Soviet Union.

The term cult of personality can be defined simply as 'the practice by which a leader is elevated to a pre-eminent status through a propaganda campaign' (RM 2009). However, several components are required for a cult, the most important elements being myth, fear and hope for salvation. Max Weber suggests any leader at the centre of a personality cult should be charismatic, not in the sense used by today's media, but in the sense that 'the possessor of charismatic authority, who may be religious, political, military, or any other kind of leader, is in essence a saviour-leader – or one perceived as such' (cited in Tucker, 1977, p.383). Robert Tucker also points out that it was initially thought that

'those who become leaders do so by virtue of their possession in superior degree of certain personal traits – such as stamina, decisiveness, composure – which make it their fate to reach positions of leadership' (1977, p.383).

However, subsequent evaluations of those who have risen to positions of prominence have been attributed to 'situationism', which argues that 'the nature of a group's situation at a given time predetermines what traits are likely to bring a certain individual to the fore as the leader and what traits will impede such an outcome in others' (Tucker 1977, p.383). Emily Johnson argues that cults of personality have tended to come about

'as the result of the confluence of several distinct cultural trends: conscious top-down efforts to produce a new mythology of power and spontaneous expressions of reverence for Party leaders that are, even if self-interested, are largely uncoached' (2009, p.3).

She goes on to suggest that she is not alone in this belief, citing works by Tumarkin, Davies and Ennker, which all help her to reach the conclusion that leader cults emerge out of 'unprompted adulation and toadying as much as carefully orchestrated efforts to engineer new objects of worship, rituals, and belief systems' (2009, p.3). Furthermore, Johnson believes that, as much as they may shed light on the centre of power, 'political cults are always more about the act of worship than

the godhead per se' (2009, p.5). However, it seems that egocentricity in leadership may also contribute to a cult of personality. Tucker advises

'entrusting leadership to individuals without illusions of godlike greatness and resulting inner insecurity, the craving for reassuring admiration, and resentful oversensitivity to criticism; individuals who have learned to accept themselves as the imperfect, limited, fallible human beings that they are' as they are more likely to be 'motivated by the desire to serve' (1977, p.390).

Clearly, those individuals with the negative characteristics as described by Tucker are far more likely to seek reassurance and greatness in a cult of personality, whether it has been created from above, or has been 'bottom-up' in its origins.

The extent to which Putin possesses the characteristics required in order to form a cult and whether the cult is genuine will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter. However, it seems important to acknowledge that on a superficial level, Putin fulfils the requirements needed to be a leader of cult status. His public relations team has generated a sense of mystery around Putin, releasing limited information about his earlier life. Furthermore, they have ensured that he was perceived to be the man who could rescue Russia from the chaos of the Yeltsin era and by his own hand Putin demonstrated his clear knowledge of the problems facing Russia: 'he published an open letter to voters which outlined Russia's problems. The open letter offered no concrete solutions, only a promise to tackle the problems and to restore Russia's former greatness' (Simons 2002). Not only can Putin be evaluated according to the criteria of a personality cult leader, his appearance as a cultural icon is comparable with those of the Soviet-era leaders.

THE POST-YELTSIN RE-POLITICISATION OF LITERATURE

It has been suggested that the re-politicisation of literature in the post-Yeltsin era is somewhat surprising. The Putin-centric nature of this literature makes it even more astonishing, not least because, as Evgenii Lesin and Viktoriya Shokhina (2006) point out, 'significantly less was written about Yeltsin, even though he was a more colourful figure' than Putin. Yet few texts featuring Yeltsin as the protagonist appeared during his time in power. Alexander Wawrzynczak (2007) proposes that the relatively limited number of references to Yeltsin in literature was partly due to the economic position of Russia in the 1990s. He argues that

'the new authorities, and particularly the new president Boris Yeltsin, were received in a similar fashion by both the people and the cultural elite: the majority criticised and cursed the authorities, laughed at them, but most didn't pay much attention to them, and even ignored them' (2007).

Evidently, the public did not wish to read about a man who they believed was the cause of difficulties in everyday life. The arrival of Putin, as a relatively unknown politician, caught the population's interest, particularly as there was very little information about him available and any information that was available had come through the official Kremlin channels. Greg Simons suggests that the 'rapid successions of politically correct biographies [...] have been produced under strict supervision and offer a mostly positive and glowing view of Russia's First Family' (2002), a sentiment echoed by Oleg Panfilov (2005). In spite of the large number of Putin biographies published in the early years of his career, there was virtually no new information on their pages. The official texts that have been sanctioned by the Kremlin PR machine surrounding Putin have forced those interested in the president to search for alternative sources in the hope of learning more about the 'real' Putin. Furthermore, the changes in media ownership which have allowed or endorsed the official image of Russia's second president have marginalised the debate about Putin and the wider political scene, forcing them instead to appear in less mainstream forums, such as in literature or on the stage. In turn, the abundance of literary fiction in which Putin features and the limited coverage of alternative political leaders and stances have prompted warnings about the rise of a Putin personality cult.

There are three key points that the re-politicised literature of the Putin era seeks to address. First, the tightening of state control over the media has led to the absence

of political opposition on television and newspapers and has seen an idealised image of Putin promoted by the Kremlin. As a consequence, writers have sought to rebalance the political scene by reminding the public that there are alternatives to Putin and to encourage the readership to question democracy in Russia. Second, literature seeks to answer the question 'Who is Mr Putin?' and provide a contrast with the image presented by the Kremlin. Finally, it seems that the attention paid to Putin both in literature and on a wider scale has been considered by some as reminiscent of a personality cult. Subsequently writers have felt the need to discuss whether a personality cult devoted to Putin is emerging in post-Soviet Russia.

THE CLAMPDOWN ON THE MEDIA

It is clear that the media have played a significant role in promoting Putin and his policies at the expense of political plurality in post-Soviet Russia. As Panfilov points out, 'the new [Putin-era] authorities made no secret of the fact that they wanted an obedient and patriotic press, of the kind acceptable to the government' (2005, p.8). The media coverage of various tragedies, including the apartment block bombings in August and September 1999 and the Kursk tragedy the following year, was unpalatable to the Russian authorities and consequently they endeavoured to find some means of controlling the media. In September 2000, Putin signed the 'Doctrine on Information Security', which, although not legally binding, paved the way for subsequent policy. In spite of the document's recognition of 'the constitutional rights and freedoms of man and citizen in obtaining and using information' and its promise to 'guarantee freedom of mass information and a ban on censorship', it sets out the need to

'strengthen the state mass media, to expand their potential for providing Russian and foreign citizens with authentic information in a timely manner [and] to intensify the shaping of open state information resources and to husband them more effectively' (Government of the Russian Federation 2000).

Arguably, the most worrying aspects of these guidelines are the state's declaration of the need to step up

'counter-propaganda activities aimed at preventing the negative consequences of the dissemination of disinformation about the internal policy of Russia' and 'the creation for Russian missions and organizations abroad of conditions for work to neutralize the disinformation being disseminated there on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation' (Government of the Russian Federation 2000),

which suggests that the authorities intend to use any means to soften or silence criticisms of policies or actions.

As a result of this document, the independence of the media since the beginning of the Putin term has been debatable. The state has control over the *Rossiia* (Russia) and *Vesti* (News) television channels through the *Vserossiiskaya gosudarstvennaya televizionnaya i radioveshchatelnaya kompaniya* (VGTRK; The All-Russia State Television and Radio Company)⁶⁴ as well as various radio stations and the *RIA Novosti* news agency. Furthermore, the state owns a controlling share in the *Pervyi kanal* (Channel One) television channel and through Gazprom, governs the *NTV* and *TNT* television channels as well. *Rossiia* and *Pervyi kanal* can be viewed by almost ninety-nine per cent of the population. The TV Centre station has the fourth largest coverage of any of the television channels and is owned by the administration of the city of Moscow (TV Centre 2000). Much of the printed press, if it is not state owned, is pro-Kremlin. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (Russian Gazette) and *Izvestiya* (News) lend their support to the government, as do *Trud* (Labour), *Komsomolskaya pravda* (Komsomol Truth), *Moskovskii komsomolets* (Moscow Komsomolets) and *Argumenty i fakty* (Arguments and Facts) (Panfilov 2005, p.11). The loyalty of the press towards the Kremlin was demonstrated in December 2001, when 'several Russian newspapers refused to publish any excerpts' from *Pikantnaya družba: Moya podruga Lyudmila Putina, ee semya i drugie tovarishchi* (2002, *Piquant Friendship: My Friend Lyudmila Putin, her Family and Other Comrades*), a book about the Putin family written by Irene Pietsch, a former friend from the time when the Putins had lived in Germany (Simons 2002). This was in spite of the atmosphere at the time, when any information about Putin was eagerly devoured by the electorate. However, state control over a large proportion of the media meant not only that it could prevent the dissemination of unpalatable information, it could also ensure that only a positive image of Putin was promoted. As Simons highlights,

'news often showed favourable coverage of Putin, surrounded by supporters. A positive spin was also put on his refusal to participate in televised debates. [...] A majority of news coverage was devoted to

⁶⁴ The *Vserossiiskaya gosudarstvennaya televizionnaya i radioveshchatelnaya kompaniya* (VGTRK) was founded in 1990 and controls five national television stations, two international networks, five radio stations and between eighty and ninety regional television channels (<http://vgtrk.com/about>).

following Putin. The positive spin could be maintained in spite [sic i.e. in spite] of the saturation coverage, because Putin only gave interviews to sympathetic reporters' (Brown cited in Simons 2002).

However, the promotion of Putin was not limited to the early part of his political career when he was relatively unknown. The level of media coverage devoted to Putin remained high, even in the latter part of his second term. Natalya Rostova (2008) draws on research carried out by the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations, which surveyed nightly news programmes broadcast between 6pm and midnight, from 1 October to 26 October 2007. The statistics reveal that of the state-owned channels *NTV* devoted almost forty-seven per cent of its news air time to Putin, closely followed by *Pervyi kanal* (forty-two per cent), *TV Centre* (thirty-seven per cent) and *Rossiya* (thirty-six per cent) (Rostova 2008). Only *Ren-TV*, a private television company, balanced its news coverage, devoting just fourteen per cent of its coverage to Putin (Rostova 2008). Rostova expresses her surprise that even after eight years Putin was still a significant feature of nightly news broadcasts, as if the 'election campaign was still going on' (2008), yet Simons emphasises the fact that 'an image cannot be created and then left to its own devices, because the message design will ultimately fail' (2002). Having gone to the effort of controlling the media and ensuring that the representation of Putin was what they wanted, the Kremlin could not abandon the upkeep of his image.

The concerns associated with the relatively rigid control that the state has exercised over the media and the information that is released are exacerbated by the population's somewhat limited desire for access to a wider range of information. Arkady Babchenko (2008) argues that although there is no longer censorship in the Soviet sense, the apathy on the part of Russia's citizens is tantamount to censorship, albeit in a different form. He suggests that people are 'censoring their minds', shutting out the truth because they simply do not wish to know (Babchenko 2008). The consequence of this attitude is that the authorities are provided with a further means of conveying the message as they wish it to be seen. The population does not question the reports about events such as the Kursk and Beslan tragedies in 2000 and 2004 respectively, so the state does not feel compelled to provide accurate information and plays the population's apathy to its advantage (Babchenko 2008).

Thanks to 'a mixture of legal manoeuvring and intimidation, high-profile opposition media were pacified. This reduced the availability and access to alternative

information (to the government's view) in Russian society' (Simons 2002). The lack of information about other political viewpoints, the absence of a media which is able to hold the government to account and the growing apathetic population have meant that other forums for debate have to be found. Literature and cinema have traditionally been used as a means for promoting 'unorthodox' ideas and, more recently, the internet has become a forum where opinions can be exchanged. Indeed, some Russian bloggers view their online postings as being similar to the kitchen debates of the Soviet era, 'when society's major forum for discussion was the kitchens of the intelligentsia' (Parkhomenko 2008, p.175). However, as illustrated later in this chapter, there is every chance that blogs and other online postings are not necessarily independent from the state: Kononenko's own experiences of being approached and offered money in exchange for partial control over his website materials suggest that the state is hoping to exert its influence in cyberspace as well. As a condition of accepting the money, the unnamed sponsor 'retained for himself the right to influence the site's content' (Anon 2004). Such a payment could be construed as a means of ensuring that the satirical website remained online throughout Putin's second-term election campaign, yet the right of the mystery benefactor to request changes to the content of the site raises a myriad of questions surrounding his identity and his motivation for providing financial support for Kononenko's website.

POLITICAL CONTROL IN THE INFORMATION SPHERE

In spite of the constitutional declaration that details the rights of Russian citizens to obtain and disseminate information and the frequent assertions that censorship in Russia is illegal, the state's actions towards freedom of information and official support for the population's entitlement to information suggest that political authorities continue to exert influence over the various media and the information that is distributed to the wider population. In its bid for control of the media, the state has been somewhat confounded by the internet and its usage ever since access to the worldwide web began in the mid-1990s in Russia. As Ivan Zassoursky points out, even in its "amateur" phase' the Russian-language internet was a place where people could essentially publish exactly what they wanted, continuing the 'popular and "underground" traditions, beginning with jokes and ending with *samizdat*' (2001, p.162). Almost as soon as the internet achieved some commercial viability, literature began to appear online, no doubt because journalists were among some of the first to get involved with posting materials to the various web pages. It is also of little surprise that politicians sought to find methods of monitoring online

information and correspondence. In 1998, the state planned to introduce SORM-2, a surveillance system that would allow them to observe the content exchanged online. Technical and cost issues aside, the desire to monitor communications was viewed as 'a real danger to the atmosphere of total freedom that had reigned on the net' (Zassoursky 2001, p.182). In 1999, and again in 2000, concerns about the freedom of information on the net and how the government would utilise the data it collected prompted Putin to offer assurances that no right would be infringed (Zassoursky 2001, p.183). Although internet penetration in Russia remains relatively low, Zassoursky is correct when he highlights the fact that 'the internet is playing the primary role of permitting the survival of the diversity in the information system' (2001, p.184), thus it is of little surprise that the state wishes to find a means for exerting greater control over the internet.

POLITICAL POLICY USED TO CONTROL WRITERS

In addition to its desire to manipulate the population's attitude towards and understanding of politics in Russia through the media, the state has also made attempts to control writers and influence the content of their works using the Russian legal system. Recent years have seen efforts to limit artistic freedoms by threatening, or actually prosecuting writers, according to laws that were not originally intended for use in such circumstances. Alexander Verkhovsky (2008) suggests that the 'Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity' (2002) is being used to stifle freedom of speech in Russia. Although the law was introduced in order to 'strengthen the provisions for counteracting ideological tendencies which posed a threat to society' (Verkhovsky 2008), it makes provision for activities which 'pose no threat to society at all, like affirming the primacy of a particular religion as many religious believers do' (Verkhovsky 2008). By way of an example, Verkhovsky (2008) cites the decision to ban the eighteenth-century text *The Book of the Unity of God* written by Mohammed ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, which appears a somewhat peculiar use of the law. What was a greater cause for concern was the use of the same law in the evaluation of two books by Andrei Piontkovsky, a political writer and analyst who has been an outspoken critic of Putin's 'managed democracy'. In September 2007 prosecutors failed to prove that Piontkovsky's texts 'constituted extremist activity' and declared that they would have to be sent to a panel of experts in order to decide whether the content was, by Russian law, extremist (*La Russophobe* 2008). The outcome of the experts' decision was that Piontkovsky's texts could not be construed as extremist and that they did not amount to the 'incitement of social, racial, national or religious dissension' (*Grani.ru* 2008). The

use of the 'Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity' (2002) was undoubtedly used inappropriately in the Piontkovsky case, yet his experiences are not unique. In June 2002, Vladimir Sorokin was charged with the production and dissemination of pornography in relation to his novel *Goluboe salo* (1999, *Blue Lard*). (The implications of this accusation are discussed at greater length later in this chapter.) Unlike Piontkovsky, Sorokin did not stand trial as the case was dismissed, but the use of the legal system in an attempt to silence a writer is reminiscent of the Soviet era and suggests that while the authorities assert that censorship in Russia is illegal, there are significant attempts to circumnavigate this tenet of the constitution.

The desire to influence the content of literature was reinforced by Putin at a meeting with young writers in February 2007, where he acknowledged the significant role that literature continues to play as a means of conveying information and ideas and that in spite of the developments in the mass media and the internet, its importance should not be dismissed. Furthermore, Putin recognised that the advancement of Russian-language literature represented a special importance from the point of view of the interests of the state and strengthening the position of Russia abroad (Prezident Rossii 2007). In answering the calls of the young writers who complained that one of the biggest challenges facing writers in contemporary Russia was making a living from writing, Putin observed that in order for the authorities to provide any form of financial support then the government must define the priorities for such works, which are: a healthy way of life; the family; the army; security; the war on drugs; and so on. He also suggested that the state must consider the necessity of supporting literature that develops taste and creativity, which preserves the Russian language and encourages readers to think (Prezident Rossii 2007). Although it is impossible to be certain of the young writers' private thoughts regarding the notion that the state, in return for financial support, is entitled to determine the content of the material produced, it appears that there was no overt opposition to this sentiment. What is quite a different matter is the state using the law to guarantee that writers who are not entirely favourable to the incumbent regime are silenced.

'CLEANSING' RUSSIA

In addition to the more subtle methods used by the government, whose chief aim appears to be limiting information regarding Russia's political diversity, or lack thereof, and ensuring that only positive responses to the Putin regime find their way into the public realm, the state has engaged in several acts that could be construed

as a blatant attempt at censorship. In 2002, the state-sponsored youth group *Idushchie vmeste* announced a campaign aimed at 'cleansing post-Soviet literature' (Bershtein and Hadden 2007), offering a two-volume edition of collected works by Boris Vasiliev (1929-) in exchange for texts by Viktor Pelevin (1962-), Viktor Erofeev (1947-) and Vladimir Sorokin (1955-), whose works were considered 'harmful'. The aim of the book exchange was to ensure that works by Pelevin, Erofeev and Sorokin were returned to the authors and not available for sale again. Representatives of *Idushchie vmeste* were of the view that 'the books by these authors do not represent cultural values and that their popularity was based solely on advertisements' (Newsru.com 2002a). The book exchange was relatively unsuccessful, not least because *Idushchie vmeste* had failed to obtain permission from Boris Vasiliev to use his works in such a way, which he immediately prohibited. Vasiliev had been approached by the organisation, who asked whether they could distribute his books free of charge to schools and children's libraries (Newsru.com 2002a). The number of 'harmful' texts that were exchanged for the 'tome of exemplary fiction' (was just 148 copies of Pelevin and 102 copies of Sorokin of the 6,700 volumes sent in to *Idushchie vmeste* (Bershtein and Hadden 2007). Despite the lack of impact that their book exchange programme had, *Idushchie vmeste* reignited its campaign against Sorokin when it transpired that he would be working with the Bolshoi Theatre to write a new opera. At this point *Idushchie vmeste's* crusade turned from being relatively harmless into something more sinister. Thanks to a complaint made by a member of *Idushchie vmeste* in June 2002, the public prosecutor 'made clear his intention to charge Sorokin and his publisher, *Ad Marginem*, with the production and distribution of pornography' (Bershtein and Hadden 2007), a crime carrying a fine or a prison sentence of up to two years. The case against Sorokin was finally dismissed in April 2003 after Sorokin announced his intention to counter-sue *Idushchie vmeste* for violating his copyright and the unauthorised reproduction of his work – *Idushchie vmeste* had handed out pamphlets containing quotations from Sorokin's novel *Goluboe salo* (1999) at their protests.

Although Sorokin's novel was not targeted for its political content, the behaviour of the state towards an author because of the content of his texts is a legitimate cause for concern. Yet it seems that the authorities are not united over the correct course of action. In some instances, the campaign provoked outraged concern. Mikhail Shvydkoi, the then Minister of Culture, said

'[The organisers of this action] are summoning the return of censorship, are speaking out against the constitutional right to freedom of expression. They propose that it is precisely they who have some higher knowledge of what is "healthy" literature and what is not... We still remember the system of requisitioning of "harmful" books that existed in the Soviet Union. And we remember how such things end' (*Newsru.com* 2002b).

Putin's senior assistant, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, added 'it builds a certain historical parallel [with] Mandelstam, Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky' (*Lenta.ru* 2002). Yet in contrast, the Interfax news agency quoted Oleg Mironov, the Human Rights Ombudsman, as saying, 'Writers should speak of the reasonable and the eternal instead of cursing and describing improper scenes' (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: Newslines* 2002) and that although censorship in Russia is forbidden, '[it] does not mean that producers of art and mass media may write about whatever they please. They must have an internal censor [...]' (*Newsru.com* 2002c). Whether the action against Sorokin was intended simply to provoke debate, or whether it was an attempt to impose greater regulation is not clear, not even from the authorities. Sorokin himself suggested that *Idushchie vmeste's* actions were a plan by the state to test the water to see if society was ready for a purge (Bershtein and Hadden 2007). The response to *Idushchie vmeste's* performance was so hostile that the state was forced to rethink its methods.

PUTIN AS A LITERARY HERO

In addition to the political policies that are being employed to manage literature, Putin has also begun to appear as a literary hero in his own right. Rogatchevski points out that even Putin's official biography *Ot pervogo litsa* (2000 *Vladimir Putin: Firsthand*), portrays Putin as 'a rather secretive individual'. The text reveals 'little of profound significance about his past and his plans for the future' (2008). Andrei Kolesnikov, a journalist for the newspaper *Kommersant* and a member of the 'Kremlin pool', has written no fewer than nine books about Putin, the success of which he attributes to the human side of Putin that is shown in these texts.⁶⁵ Given

⁶⁵ Kolesnikov has written a number of texts about Putin: *Vladimir Putin. Ot pervogo litsa* (2000, *Vladimir Putin: Firsthand*), *Skovannye odnoi tsepyu* (2005, *Chained Together*), *Menya Putin videl!* (2005, *Putin saw me!*), *Ya Putina videl!* (2004, *I saw Putin!*), *Uvidet Putina i umeret* (2005, *To see Putin and Die*), *Vladimir Putin. Mezhduevropoi i Aziei* (2005, *Vladimir Putin: Between Europe and Asia*), *Vladimir Putin. Elitnoe podrazhdenie* (2005,

that none of the 'factual' books written about Putin appears to provide the answers to the questions that readers have, it is not surprising that there are numerous fiction works that feature Putin and draw on real-life events in order to try fill in the gaps. Just as the Kremlin PR machine was able to create a specific image of Putin, so too have writers. The absence of concrete facts allowed authors to 'draw Putin as he (or she) would like to have seen him' (Krongauz 2005). Although he may not always be named, allusions to his past in the KGB, his skiing ability and the judo that he practises, immediately allow the reader to guess about whom the author is writing (Krongauz 2005).

Krongauz suggests that part of the reason that Putin has become something of a popular hero has stemmed from the significant role that he played in the post-Yeltsin era. Since 2000, Russia has been a very different nation in which to live and some believe that without Putin, this might not have been the case. As a consequence, many Russians feel that they 'exist on Putin's stage and irrespective of their desires, they are defined by his actions' (Krongauz 2005). Thus, it is unsurprising that writers are attempting to understand this 'story' and provide the reader with some point of reference in the post-2000 era. References to an existence in an era defined by a person can be read in the context of the Stalin-era population, whom Brooks has described as active participants in Stalin's 'omnipresent magic theatre' (2000, p.xvi). The idea that the Russian population is seeking to answer the question 'Who is Mr Putin?' because of the way in which his actions have defined the post-Yeltsin era has prompted some to suggest that this curiosity has become an obsession and has contributed to the generation of a personality cult.

THE POST-SOVIET CULT OF PERSONALITY

It has been argued that in 'democratic' Russia, there is very limited scope for a personality cult to develop and any emergence of a Putin cult can be attributed to the Kremlin's actions rather than to a grass-roots movement from the people (Kagarlitsky 2001). To achieve a status that could rival that of any of the former Soviet leaders appears virtually impossible in twenty-first-century Russia. The lack of powerful structures built on strong foundations will prevent any cult of personality

Vladimir Putin: An Elite Unit), *Vladimir Putin. Ravnoudalenie oligarkhov* (2005, *Vladimir Putin: Equidistant Oligarchs*), *Razdvoenie VVP. Kak Putin Medvedeva vybral* (2008, *How Putin chose Medvedev*).

from becoming too great. During the Soviet period, notably the Stalin era, the posters, busts, stories, and films were the trimmings, 'something to be pasted on the outside of the package' (*Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 2001). In the post-Soviet world the constitutional limits on the duration of the presidential term should prevent the building of any structures on which a cult can be formed. However, the number of people who agree with the statement that there are no signs of a personality cult fell dramatically throughout 2007. In March 2007, fifty-seven per cent of those questioned felt that there were no signs of a Putin personality cult. By April 2007 this percentage had fallen to forty-nine, and by October 2007, the number who believed that there was no evidence of a Putin cult of personality was just thirty-eight per cent (*Obshchaya gazeta* 2007).

Certainly, during the course of the Putin era, the memorabilia devoted to him and celebrating his presidency have been impressive. Far more items apparently glorifying his time in power have been produced than were made in support of Yeltsin. However, the extent to which these memorabilia and the coverage of Putin in the media represent the emergence of a personality cult continues to be disputed. On the first anniversary of his inauguration as president, thousands of students and schoolchildren sang his praises outside the walls of the Kremlin (*Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 2001), and the *Nashi* youth movement demonstrated its support for Putin by persuading tens of thousands of young people in Moscow to send text messages to Putin (Myers 2007). The celebrations surrounding Putin's fiftieth and fifty-fifth birthdays have drawn clearer parallels with Soviet traditions, particularly Nikita Mikhalkov's film *55*, a twenty-minute film shown in October 2007 on the *Rossiia* television channel, which depicted Putin's successes and the benefits that the nation enjoyed under his direction.

Of course, it could be argued that the Russian people like to have a strong leader, and that this is the role that Putin has filled. Panfilov suggests that 'there are many Russians who are still convinced that Russia needs a tsar, but as it is impossible to restore the Romanov rule, they are content with the KGB colonel as a replacement' (2005, p.3). Babchenko goes further, arguing that 'the Russian people never aspired to freedom, they always aspired to having a kind tsar [...] the Russian people's freedom-loving and free-thinking spirit destroyed itself nearly 100 years ago'

(2008).⁶⁶ In contrast, other commentators believe that the constitution and the tenets of democracy will prevent the concentration of power in the hands of the president – the cult is limited because of the two-term policy. In spite of the lack of consensus regarding the existence of a Putin personality cult, there is evidence to suggest that the promotion a particular image of Putin was part of the Kremlin's scheme. Arguably, the extent to which this plan has worked is yet to be seen, particularly if the chief aim of the plan was to ensure Putin's re-election as president in 2012.

Conclusions

It is impossible to view the three elements that have contributed to the re-politicisation of literature in isolation from one another. The restriction of information in mainstream forums has forced the population to look at other sources for information about alternatives to Putin and his policies. In addition, the tightening control over the media has had a significant impact on how people view the level of support that Putin enjoys. Although there is a lack of consensus regarding the extent to which the Putin phenomenon could be equated with a cult, the appearance of, or references to Putin in culture should be viewed with caution. The ways in which he is represented in the media and less mainstream forums give deeper insight into the political situation in Putin-era Russia.

⁶⁶ See Vasily Grossman *Vse techet* (1961, *Everything Flows/ Forever Flowing*) which places Lenin's cult of personality in the context of Russian history and the need for Russians to find a saviour.

HOW PUTIN BECAME THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER STORIES

The one-sided, positive promotion of Putin on television and in newspapers has undoubtedly forced those who wish to question his actions to find alternative forums in which they can do so. In order to explore the impact that the post-Yeltsin changes have had on the content of literature, three authors and a selection of their works will be used as case studies. Viktor Teterin's two plays *Putin.doc* (2005) and *Preemnik.doc* (2007) discuss Putin and his presidency. Furthermore, they represent a change in perceptions of Putin over time. The use of drama is also significant, as there have been suggestions that even literature is not immune from political influence. Five of Dmitrii Bykov's fairy tales; *Kak Putin stal prezidentom SShA* (2005, *How Putin Became the President of the USA*); *Tochka dzhi* (G-spot); *Kak Ivenok, cherepakha i vse-vse-vse peli pesnyu* (*How the Lion Cub, the Tortoise and Everyone Altogether Sang a Song*); *O tom, kak burya snesla bashnyu* (*A Tale About the Storm that Destroyed the Tower*); and *Vozhd krasnorozhikh, ili Borrowed-In* (*The Red-Mugged Chief, or 'Borrowed-In'*), all of which were written prior to Putin's second term, will be used to examine the treatment of Putin in literature. Bykov's treatment of Putin is interesting primarily because he offers multiple descriptions of the president, which vary by story. Bykov's descriptions of Putin are not consistent; sometimes he defends Putin, at others he highlights the problems associated with Putin. Finally, a selection of vignettes published by Maksim Kononenko, under the pseudonym *Mr Parker*, on his website www.vladimir.vladimirovich.ru will be used. Kononenko has written more than 2,000 sketches since he started his website. An analysis of ten per cent of these stories will be sufficient to gain an understanding of the way in which Putin is portrayed. This section will analyse how these three authors treat the areas that have been discussed thus far in this chapter: the lack of political plurality in contemporary Russia and the promotion of an idealised image of Putin; the question 'Who is Mr Putin?'; and the extent to which literature, and these texts in particular, are contributing to a Putin cult of personality.

VIKTOR TETERIN: AN EVOLVING UNDERSTANDING OF THE PUTIN PRESIDENCY

Viktor Teterin describes *Putin.doc* (2005) and *Preemnik.doc* (2007) as 'realistic one-act plays with elements of the absurd'. The areas on which they touch are pertinent given the changes to the political climate in Putin's Russia and the apparent re-politicisation of literature in this period. In addition, it is important to note the years in which these plays were written and to acknowledge that the audience's

understanding of the events depicted in the first play, *Putin.doc* (2005) is altered after reading the second play, *Preemnik.doc* (2007).

The 'elements of the absurd' (Teterin 2005) are clear from the outset in *Putin.doc* (2005) when the audience is introduced to the protagonists Ivan Petrov and Petr Ivanov, who are about to embark on a competition to discover which of them loves Putin more. In the early rounds of their competition, both Petr and Ivan devise rather predictable submissions: Petr commissions a life-size portrait of Putin painted in oils and teaches his troops the song and dance routine to *I want a man like Putin*. Ivan's contribution is a poem dedicated to the glory of Putin and his presidency, followed by the decision to wallpaper the entirety of his flat in life-sized posters of Putin commanding a submarine. The idea of a competition to demonstrate who loves Putin the most is farcical, yet Teterin is only drawing on real-life examples of the lengths to which people will go to demonstrate their support for Putin.⁶⁷ However, Ivan and Petr's attempts at glorifying Putin could be interpreted as a cause for concern because of the way in which they replicate the Soviet methods employed for venerating leaders. Ivan's allegiance to Putin can be seen in the last lines of his poem, where he declares 'I will forever be known as Russian / And to die for you – what could be more lovely?!' (Teterin 2005). Petr's creation of the 'Putin Sharpshooter' and Ivan's request to rename one of the streets in the city in which they live further evoke comparisons with the Soviet era.⁶⁸ Entries in the latter stages of the competition become more sinister: Ivan has changed his name by deed poll to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and obtained a new passport with an appropriate photograph and Petr has spent all of his money on plastic surgery to make himself look like Putin. There are two reasons why Teterin has constructed his play based on the escapades of Ivan and Petr, whose actions parallel the deeds of real Russians. First, that Teterin wishes to suggest that the glorification of Putin and

⁶⁷ See O'Flynn, 'Erotic Dreams and One Liners' (2008), for details of the lengths to which Putin supporters will go to demonstrate their allegiance. In St Petersburg, one young supporter had Putin's portrait tattooed on his arm, while another man walked 2,000 kilometres to demonstrate his support for Putin's presidency.

⁶⁸ Petr's 'Putin Sharpshooter' award was based on the Soviet-era 'Voroshilov Sharpshooter' prize. The 'Voroshilov Sharpshooter' was a badge awarded by the *Soyuz Obshchestv sodeistviya oborone i aviatsionno-khimicheskomu stroitelstvu SSSR* (OSOAVIAKhIM, Union of Societies of Assistance to Defence and Aviation-Chemical Construction of the USSR), which was aimed at preparing the reserves for the armed forces. (See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DOSAUF>.)

demonstrations of support for his presidency are coming from the people rather than being imposed by the state. The absence of Putin from the stage in the first eight of the nine scenes in Teterin's play reinforces the idea that if there is a cult of personality, it is being generated by the people. However, Teterin has entitled the play *Putin.doc* (2005), implying that although Putin is not a central character on stage, he is a controlling figure behind the scenes watching to identify people and events that he can manipulate, hence his interest in the competition that Ivan and Petr hold. Teterin's second reason for framing the action of *Putin.doc* (2005) around Ivan and Petr's competition is closely linked to the first. Teterin is warning the audience not only to be careful about laughing at what appear to be comical acts of promoting the president, but also to be cautious about the amount of power that they are allowing one 'ordinary' man to wield because they cannot know to what ends he will use it. Teterin wishes to suggest that anyone can occupy Putin's role, emphasising the fact that Putin rose to prominence from unemployment. Ivan's name change and Petr's plastic surgery exemplify this notion that anyone could have become president. The chief aim of Teterin's play is to highlight the potential for a cult of personality to emerge in the post-Soviet era and to encourage the audience to understand that its reverential treatment of the president is causing the disappearance of legitimate opposition and a lack of diversity on the political spectrum.

In addition to their competition, Ivan and Petr discuss Putin's policies and events in Russia. This debate allows the audience a different view of Putin's policies and encourages them to think about the wider consequences of Putin's schemes. In *Putin.doc* (2005), Teterin appears to be presenting a balanced dialogue about some of the policies that Putin has introduced, yet on closer inspection, it is clear that he is asking the audience to examine the policies in greater depth. At first glance, Putin's plan to double GDP within five years and to clamp down on big businesses that have been evading tax are practical policies with beneficial outcomes for the whole population. However, it is precisely these 'easy win' policies that are high on the agenda for the majority of the population that Tucker (1977) mentions when he outlines the ways in which cults of personality can arise and consolidate power in a nation. Teterin's decision to include debates about the monetisation of welfare benefits and the speeches that Putin made thanking the citizens of Chechnya for their sacrifice serve to question one of the fundamental qualities that the Russians

desire in their leader, that he should be strong.⁶⁹ On closer inspection, the policy regarding the monetisation of benefits clearly discriminates against those in society who require the most help from the state. The way in which Ivan and Petr discuss the policy raises further questions about Putin's view of the electorate and the voters whom he wishes to retain. Ivan explains to Petr the motivations for the changes to the system,

'The benefits – they were given to everyone, Chernobyl victims, Afghan veterans and other citizens. But our state does not get anything from them anymore. Do you agree? But from a civil servant, from me, for example, the state is always getting something. The civil servant always works, unceasingly thinks about the good of the state, unceasingly!' (Teterin 2005).

Thanks to Ivan's explanation, Petr claims to fully understand the changes and his only comment is that if Putin made a mistake regarding the continuation of civil servants' benefits, then it was because his advisers had misled him. Petr absolves Putin of any responsibility and does not see that the strong leader has crushed those least able to influence the state. Putin's decree of 16 May 2003, which Petr recites from memory, further illuminates the way Putin's words distort the real events. Putin praises the 'ordinary' Chechens and speaks about the necessity of paying a high price in order to retain the territorial integrity of Russia. He calls on those present to 'bow [their] heads in memory of the war dead and the peaceful civilians [...] all those who paid with their lives in order that the country was not torn apart and who carried out their duty to the end' (Teterin 2005). Petr states that he liked this particular decree because of its 'majesty', invoking the image of a king retaining the geographical integrity of his nation. The sentiment in this decree could be viewed as a precursor to Putin's comments in his 'State of the Nation' speech in 2005, when he suggested that one of the greatest geopolitical tragedies of the twentieth century was the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ The least Putin can do, if he cannot restore the USSR, is to ensure that Russia itself does not fracture into its

⁶⁹ See Mereu, 'Small-Town Seniors Turn On Putin' (2005), which details Putin's 2004-05 policy of monetising welfare benefits for people, most notably pensioners and the disabled, so that they would no longer receive free public transport or a contribution towards their household utility bills.

⁷⁰ See BBC, 'Putin address to nation: Excerpts' (2005) "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. And for the Russian people, it became a real drama."

various republics. Arguably, the most significant points that Teterin raises are the questions regarding Putin's approval rating and the level of democracy in action in Russia. On first reading, Putin's encouragement to the people of Russia to use their voting rights sounds like a message to Western critics to withdraw any unfavourable comments because democracy in Russia works differently. Putin says, 'if you come to the election and give your vote in favour of a political leader or to a political party with which you can sympathise and in which you trust, and if others like you, hundreds of thousands, millions, do the same, then this political force receives not only the legal right to participate in the life of the country and define the direction of its development, but, more importantly, this political force receives the moral right. Or does not receive that right, which is an equally important result' (Teterin 2005). Putin's words suggest that he is strongly in favour of democracy, yet when considered with reference to his approval rating and the state manipulation of television, his words sound somewhat less convincing.

Putin.doc (2005) does not seek to reinforce a cult of personality, rather it serves to demonstrate to the audience that there may be elements of such a cult emerging because of the actions of 'ordinary' people and the Kremlin. Concerns about the emergence of a cult are founded on two key points. The first is in the behaviour of those who seek to show their devotion to Putin and the methods which they employ are reminiscent of those used for articulating loyalty to the Party during the Soviet era. The second is in Putin's ability to retain his high approval rating and obscure the opposition while promoting populist policies, which do not encourage the electorate to examine events on the political stage with as much rigour as is perhaps necessary.

Encouraging the audience to think about the lack of diversity in Russian politics is Teterin's primary aim in *Preemnik.doc* (2007). Although Teterin is not suggesting that Putin has successfully created a cult of personality, there is an implication that the 'elements of the absurd', as witnessed in *Putin.doc* (2005), are not simply entertaining, but that they mask one of the most worrying aspects of Putin's presidency: that having surrounded himself with devoted followers, he is in a position to find a means of guaranteeing a consecutive third term while making such a change to the constitution appear democratic. Even if Teterin is simply reflecting the prevalent concern regarding the end of Putin's second term and the worries about the disruption to the plans that Putin implemented during the course of his presidency, it appears that he is trying to persuade the audience to consider the

wider implications of allowing Putin to govern for a further four years. Although it is also described as 'a realistic one-act play with elements of the absurd', the tone of *Preemnik.doc* (2007) is much darker than that of *Putin.doc* (2005) and it alters the audience's perception of events depicted in the 2005 play, shifting the elements of frivolity from comical to ominous.

In contrast to *Putin.doc* (2005), Putin features as one of the protagonists (alongside Ivan Petrov and Petr Ivanov) and appears on stage from the beginning of *Preemnik.doc* (2007). The Putin of the 2005 play is characterised by the way in which Ivan and Petr portray him in their discussions about his policies and through their attempts to prove their love for him. Arguably, Putin's decision to appoint two men who have been largely occupied with progressively sillier schemes to obtain relative positions of power within the government could have made him seem as ridiculous as Ivan and Petr. However, the reasons behind his decision become clear when the audience is exposed to the Putin of 2007, who is manipulative, calculating and entirely unconcerned with the democratic process, troubled instead by securing an unconstitutional third term as president. Putin's manipulation of his devoted followers is evident from the outset, when he prompts Ivan and Petr to suggest ways in which a consecutive third term could be achieved. Perhaps surprisingly, Putin expressly points out that the nation has chosen a democratic course and that, even as president, he will not be the man to alter the four-year term that was outlined in the constitution. Petr suggests that Putin simply cancel the elections and declares himself 'president for life' (Teterin 2007), a proposal that is even unpalatable to Putin. In contrast, Ivan suggests that they carry out some kind of operation to ensure that Putin's path is not interrupted. Putin has not suggested either of these schemes himself, instead he simply plants the seeds of an idea and lets Ivan and Petr develop their own plans to ensure a third term. This reflects what Putin achieved with the Russian population. He constantly reminded them of the constitutional two-term limit on his presidency and asserted that he would not alter this. In doing so, he ensured that the population agonised over who his successor should be, and raised their concerns that a change in the Kremlin would result in significant upheaval for the country.

In addition to his willingness to manipulate his supporters, Putin also exhibits a calculating persona, ready to take advantage of anyone, providing they can help him to achieve his primary aim. In order to secure a consecutive third term, Putin suggests to Ivan and Petr that, as representatives supported by two different

parties, they will each run for president. Whoever of them wins is irrelevant because after the elections, Putin will remain in power behind the scenes so that there is no disruption to the path along which Russia is moving. Yet, having set Ivan and Petr on the campaign trail, Putin later calls them to explain that the plan has changed and that they must capitulate to the 'dark horse', Dmitrii Medvedev, who will win the elections and then be killed a short time later, leaving no choice but for Putin to return to power. Not only do Putin's election plans demonstrate his callous nature, they illustrate his disregard for the democratic process and his actions alter the audience's understanding of the speech reported in *Putin.doc* (2005). As well as a warning to the West not to interfere in the democratic process in Russia, it seems that the speech was used to encourage Russian voters to believe that the system was legitimate. Putin's contempt for the principles of democracy is further illuminated in *Preemnik.doc* (2007), when he explains to Ivan and Petr that 'the whole election process should look completely democratic' (Teterin 2007). He explains the reasons why Ivan and Petr should represent different groups:

'it's imperative that you both participate in the election campaign, but that you are from different parties. This is so there is an atmosphere, as they say, of democracy. This isn't to please me, above all, it's necessary for our Western partners, do you understand?' (Teterin 2007).

Once again, in an attempt to give the audience a better understanding of the Russian political environment than Putin may wish to allow, Teterin explores the ideas of different political stances through the roles offered to Petr and Ivan. He makes them representatives of *Edinstvo* and *Sotsialnaya Rossiya* respectively. Teterin explains that he has based the campaign manifestos of Petr and Ivan on the manifestos of the real Russian political parties *Edinaya Rossiya* (United Russia) and *Spravedlivaya Rossiya: Rodina/Pensionery/Zhizn* (A Just Russia: Motherland/Pensioners/ Life).⁷¹ In reality, both *Edinaya Rossiya* and *Spravedlivaya Rossiya* gave their support to Putin's chosen successor, Medvedev, illustrating that for all the apparent differences between Russia's political parties, there is virtually no chance of finding a party that will not ultimately support Putin. It seems that Teterin is

⁷¹ See Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (2008, pp.101-109) for details about Russia's political parties. He defines *Edinaya Rossiya* as promoting an 'ideology of liberal patriotism, occupying the centre-right niche in the political spectrum' (2008, p.107) and suggests that *Spravedlivaya Rossiya* was created to balance *Edinaya Rossiya* from a centre-left perspective.

hoping to highlight the narrowness of the political spectrum in post-Soviet Russia and to show that the price the population paid for having a strong leader in Putin was the severe limitations in his commitment to democracy.

Teterin's plays invite the audience to consider the extent to which Russia's political system is democratic and Teterin encourages his audience to examine the motives of the nation's leaders in greater depth. Between writing his first and second plays, Teterin's comprehension of the political situation in the country has altered and the darker elements in *Preemnik.doc* (2007) demonstrate the increased restrictions in political freedom that he has witnessed in Russia. Although Teterin does not directly refer to a Putin cult of personality, in both plays he comments on behaviour that could be viewed as contributing to a cult. In *Putin.doc* (2005), Ivan and Petr appear ridiculous in their actions throughout much of the play signalling to the audience that such conduct cannot be taken seriously. However, their glorification of Putin contributes to a change in the way that 'ordinary' Russians see him – the passers-by in scene eight pause to look at portraits of Putin in front of which there are candles burning, evoking the image of an icon in church. Teterin suggests that such veneration of the leader prevents his actions from being properly evaluated and that the reality can be hidden by clever rhetoric. The lack of political diversity further concerns Teterin and he endeavours to show the audience that in spite of apparent differences in the parties' manifestos, they do not necessarily differ in the support that they offer the incumbent president. However, Teterin's criticism of Putin and the political system in Russia is gentle. He describes both plays as having elements of the absurd, implying that neither of them should be taken seriously, but for an astute audience that recognises Teterin's use of real events and genuine political language, parallels with the contemporary situation in Russia are likely to be drawn and questions about Putin's intentions are likely to arise.

DMITRII BYKOV: A CRITICAL VIEW OF PUTIN OR HIS PEOPLE?

Although Bykov himself asserts that 'they're just fairy stories' (personal interview 2009), the content of some of the tales that appear in his collection of 'new Russian fairy stories' provides a variety of Putin images, from those that reflect his PR-generated image to those which question his position as president. Cynics might suggest that Bykov is just another author successfully making a profit by using Putin's name. Yet, it seems that Bykov is simply participating in the Soviet and Russian tradition of using the nation's leader as a source of inspiration. The tone and content of Bykov's stories are not dissimilar from Voinovich's story *V krugu*

druzei (1967, *A Circle of Friends*), in which Stalin, who is unable to do the crossword, is about to purge the editorial board which published the crossword, just as World War II breaks out. However, in satirising Putin and his actions, Bykov is challenging the accepted view of Russia's second president. The short stories used in this case study all appear in the same volume, but they can be read in isolation from one another and, unlike Teterin's plays, the reading of one of Bykov's tales does not necessarily alter the understanding of the others.

The image of Putin as a strong leader appears repeatedly in Bykov's short stories, where Putin is in command both in Russia and on the world stage. Putin's reputation as a formidable, uncomplicated leader is illustrated in *Kak Putin stal prezidentom SShA*, when he is elected over George Bush or Al Gore to be the next president of America. Bykov illustrates Putin's strengths and advantageous qualities by defining him as everything that Bush and Gore are not, as a strong leader that Russia wants and the man who will reassert Russia's standing on the world stage. In this story, Bush hears that Gore has overtaken him in the ratings, so he instructs his advisers to come up with a plan to improve his popularity. The subsequent election campaign culminates in Gore's dramatic rescue of a young girl from a burning building, his announcement that Milošević should be bombed and that he will donate hot-dogs to the starving children in Africa. Bush subsequently offers Milošević political asylum in Texas and goes over to Africa to claim the hot-dogs back whilst proving that they are ecologically unsound. The American public is confused by the election campaign and as a result, the Americans look to Russia 'where the secretive man "who is Mr Putin" reigned' (Bykov 2005, p.230). The tone that Bykov employs suggests that Putin is imbued with something of a god-given right to govern and that he is, in essence, a saviour who will rescue the people of the United States and spare them from suffering either Bush or Gore as their president, in just the same way that he saved the Russian people from the embarrassment that Yeltsin caused them. Although in this instance he is saving another people, there is the implication that he has served his purpose in saving the Russians and he is now available to do the same for other nations. The victory in the American election suggests that Putin is enabling Russia's empire to expand once again and that the Americans have finally acknowledged that the Russian approach to politics is preferable because it is not tainted by political correctness or one-upmanship. The sense that Russia is regaining equal footing with the West is also reflected in *Vozhd krasnorozhikh, ili Borrowed-In*, when Putin outwits George Bush Junior and Bill [Clinton?], forcing them to pay compensation for kidnapping

Pavel Borodin and holding him to ransom. Bush and Bill kidnap Borodin when he flies in to attend Bush's inauguration.⁷² By styling Putin according to his former KGB guise, it seems not only does Bykov wish to emphasise Russia's military might, but he appears to be suggesting something of a return to the past when the KGB wielded substantial power. In this tale, Bykov paints Putin as a leader who is able to manipulate other world leaders and he exhibits an intellect that is far superior to his counterparts in other countries. In both of these stories, Putin is a minor character, only appearing at the end to solve the problems that have arisen. The stories can be read as a warning to the West not to underestimate Putin's strength as a leader or to misjudge the importance that he places on restoring Russia's perceived super-power status.

However, the desire for a strong leader appears to have hampered the Russian population's ability to think about the other attributes that a president should possess. Furthermore, it seems that the people have forgotten that they are entitled to vote for their president. Bykov's concerns about the Russian people's lack of inclination to think for themselves are highlighted in *O tom, kak burya snesla bashnyu*. Owing to the loss of all television channels after the Ostankino broadcast aerial was damaged, neither Putin nor the general public could remember how to behave. 'Ordinary' Russians could not remember how to talk to one another, which products to use to clean the sink, or what to feed their children. Although clearly farcical, the story can be viewed as Bykov's attempt to rouse the Russian population out of the indifference and inertia that impedes their daily life. They have lost interest in everything and are no longer capable of making decisions; relying instead on someone else to instruct them. The warning in Bykov's text is clear: such apathy will mean the end of independent thinking and all decisions will be deferred to the nation's leader. However, it transpires that inside the Kremlin, Putin is suffering from a similar problem as he reveals that he relies on the television news as the source of information which tells him where in the Russian Federation he is visiting that day. The implication by Bykov is that even Putin is incapable of acting independently and without instruction, emphasising the fact that Putin is no different

⁷² See BBC, 'Kremlin aide flies home on bail' (2001) for details of Pavel Borodin's arrest. Borodin was accused of 'taking millions of dollars in bribes in return for contracts to renovate the Kremlin and other public buildings in Moscow while Boris Yeltsin was president.' Russian prosecutors carried out their own investigation, which found that there was no case to answer.

from the majority of the population and perhaps suggesting that Putin can be manipulated by the security services to guarantee their own interests.

Bykov's concerns about the damage that voter apathy is inflicting on the development of civil society and democracy also feature in *Tochka dzhi*, which sees Mother Russia asking Father Frost for a man to keep her company. She is sick of those types who fight, farm, or fall asleep on top of the stove, who are too young or too old and who leave turmoil in their wake after they have gone. Having failed again, Father Frost tells Mother Russia that she must be more specific in her request, so she puts together a comprehensive list of attributes that her companion should have:

'He should not be too young or too old, but in the prime of his life. He should not be bald or too hairy, but well-groomed.^[73] He shouldn't drink or swear. He should bring money home and he shouldn't go out spending, he shouldn't get into debt and he should economise, only not at my expense [...]' (Bykov 2005, p.232).

On visiting Mother Russia the following New Year to find out if there is anything that she would like, Father Frost is alarmed to discover that in the ecstasy of having the 'perfect' man, she has fallen into a dream-like trance and she is incapable of doing anything to challenge him. Bykov is describing the same effect that Putin has had on the Russian population: Russians believe that their ideal man has taken control of the country and he has managed to persuade them that they do not need to be concerned with politics. As a result, the people have stopped caring and have lost the ability to assess critically Putin's actions or question his decisions.

This loss of ability to examine the president's actions and the population's reluctance to really think about events that are taking place in their country (Babchenko 2008) has caused some of the more worrying aspects of the Putin regime to be obscured. Bykov's concerns about the direction in which Russia has moved under Putin and his administration are demonstrated in *Kak Ivenok, cherepakha i vse-vse-vse peli pesnyu*, which sees Putin, Kasyanov and Lesin attempt to rewrite the Soviet national anthem to suit post-Soviet Russia. Each of Putin's advisers proposes a range of lyrics, yet their suggestions are merely an assortment of words and phrases from the past versions of the Soviet and Russian

⁷³ There is a joke that Russia's recent leaders have been alternately hairy or bald. Those who had hair tended to be more conservative, those without, more reformist.

hymns.⁷⁴ Although it may appear that the Russian government is wasting time and resources on apparently trivial matters to which it finds no adequate solutions, the question of the national anthem in Bykov's story appears to be symbolic of the greater problems that Russia's leaders are having in establishing a post-Soviet national identity. They are struggling to establish a 'measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas that bind [a] population together in its homeland' (Smith 1991, p.11), which, according to Anthony Smith, are all the things a nation must have in order for a sense of identity to be fostered. Even though 'most Russians feel a strong yearning for legitimate authority and greater social cohesion' it is hard to convincingly argue that the Russian Federation is a nation-state. Indeed, Geoffrey Hosking suggests that Russia is 'more a bleeding hulk of empire: what happened to be leftover when the other republics broke away' (1997, p.484). Part of the difficulty in establishing a Russian national identity springs from the historic tradition, whereby empire has always 'tended to subsume' Russian identity and that 'at all times the survival of the empire and the maintenance of its territorial integrity were the paramount priorities for Russia's rulers' (1997, p.41). Arguably, Putin is not so different; he believes that it is his responsibility to maintain Russian territory (and if he could have his way, it does not seem entirely improbable that he would like to see some sort of reformation of the Soviet Union) at the expense of almost everything else that the country stands for. It seems that Bykov is suggesting that the current Russian leaders believe that this lack of Russian national identity can be solved with a new national anthem. Yet it is surely a cause for concern that the advisers and Putin end up with a hotchpotch of lyrics from 1944, 1977 and 1999 because this is what represents the general situation in post-Soviet Russia. The inability of the advisers to provide new words is not surprising, these men are not musicians; they are politicians. Not only does their failure to find new words imply that the politicians

⁷⁴ The Soviet Anthem replaced *The Internationale* as the national anthem of the Soviet Union in 1944, with music composed by Aleksandr Aleksandrov and lyrics by Sergei Mikhalkov. After Stalin's death, the hymn was performed without words, until 1977, when revised lyrics were approved. After the Soviet collapse in 1991, *The Patriotic Song*, which also had no lyrics was adopted. In 1999, Viktor Radugin won a competition to write lyrics for *The Patriotic Song*. However, in 2000 Putin reverted to the original Soviet anthem, with music by Aleksandrov and new lyrics written by Mikhalkov. See Vladimir Voinovich 'Gimn Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Proekt)' (n.d. 'Hymn of the Russian Federation (A project)' for the 'alternative' lyrics that he wrote for the new anthem, which can be found on his personal website.

themselves do not know in which direction Russia is moving, but also that there is no possibility of them creating a new sense of identity for the Russian population. The use of the 1944 music composed by Aleksandrov and the idea to ask Sergei Mikhalkov to pen new lyrics suggests a desire to return to that era, which may not be recognised by the general public because they are unwilling to consider such possibilities. Arguably, Bykov does not see Putin as entirely responsible for the absence of political diversity in the Russian media. In their desire both for a strong leader and for a sense of national identity which will permit them to reassert Russia's place on the world stage, the population has allowed Putin this degree of power. However, it seems that the population is unconcerned that the methods being used to establish a sense of national identity may not be the most helpful or the best use of their president's time. Once again, as Babchenko (2008) suggests, the people have simply closed their eyes to things. Furthermore, the people seem reluctant and unwilling to modify their behaviour in the light of growing concerns about a 'managed democracy' and the creation of a Russian national identity founded on a failed empire. Just as Teterin is eager to highlight the fact that Putin is just an ordinary man, it appears that Bykov is endeavouring to remind the population that Putin's origins should be remembered. Even if he is capable of restoring Russia as a world power, it does not detract from his past as someone who was recently unemployed and unsure of his future.

MAKSIM KONONENKO: POLITICAL SATIRE SAFE IN CYBERSPACE

Maksim Kononenko has been writing sketches about Putin since 2002, amassing more than 2,000 vignettes in which the president or his administration feature. Some view these vignettes as highly critical of Putin and his regime, whereas others see them as little more than a light-hearted joke at Putin's expense: 'Someone named Kostya left this message in the site's guestbook last week: "Thanks a million, Parker.⁷⁵ A fresh breeze is blowing over the country thanks to your great text. If the country had fifty others like it, then it would be fun to live with Putin"' (*The St Petersburg Times* 2004). In contrast, it has been suggested that '[...] Kononenko [is] not too much of an irritant for the Kremlin and that his stories [have] grown kinder toward Putin' (Medetsky 2005). These conflicting attitudes to Kononenko's stories reflect the differing images of Putin that appear in these vignettes.

⁷⁵ Mr Parker is Kononenko's pseudonym on the website www.vladimir.vladimirovich.ru.

Just as Teterin and Bykov have attempted to do, Kononenko's sketches offer a reminder that Putin is an ordinary man and references to his wife and children and his actions towards them in several of the vignettes demonstrate that he is no different from other Russian husbands and fathers. In one of Kononenko's sketches, Putin is described as wanting to speak with his wife about something while he is at work, so he goes to the window and shouts to her:

'Lyudmila! Lyudmila!'. As he is shouting from the window of the Kremlin it is not surprising that he does not get any response, which encourages him to shout again 'Lyudmila! Oh, what are you doing...? Lyudmila-a-a!' (Kononenko 2003a).

Putin's behaviour shocks those he works with, but for the reader it casts him in the role of husband by depicting him talking to his wife in the way that husbands talk to their wives. Putin's daughters also feature in Kononenko's sketches and reinforce the family man image. In one sketch Putin arrives home to help his daughters, Masha and Katya, with their homework, only to be horrified that it is chemistry rather than international economics or political science (Kononenko 2006a). Further insights into Putin's life, such as his favourite pop group, *Lyube* and the idea of him travelling around on the Metro contribute to the sense that he is just like any other Russian. In addition to the traits that make Putin ordinary, Kononenko constructs Putin as superstitious, a characteristic frequently associated with Russian national identity. Putin gets a shock when he finds the 'Soviet Crystal Ball' which predicts that his remaining time in office will soon end. Much to Putin's relief, Surkov explains that because the crystal ball was programmed during the Soviet era it does not understand the concept of presidential terms and parliaments and consequently gives a false reading (Kononenko 2005a).⁷⁶ The extent to which Putin believes in the bizarre is illustrated in Kononenko's sketches written towards the end of Putin's time in office, when Putin discovers that the inner Martian that has been telling him what to do for the last eight years has gone (Kononenko 2007a). However, there is a sense that Putin's superstitious beliefs are simply part of the somewhat foolish side of his character and this is a trait that Kononenko highlights in many of his vignettes.

⁷⁶ Vladislav Surkov (1964-) is a Russian businessman and politician. He is one of Putin's top aides and is credited with 'helping Putin to craft the Kremlin's centralized political system after the chaos of the 1990s' (Faulconbridge 2009).

Anatoly Medetsky (2005) suggests that Kononenko frames Putin 'as an almost childlike innocent who sometimes has trouble understanding the affairs of state and seems unaware of how he ended up in the Kremlin'. Putin's foolishness is depicted on two levels. Some of his actions are simply ill-advised, but do not cause any serious, long-term consequences. Other deeds demonstrate his complete unsuitability for the job as president. Among Putin's more absurd ideas is his decision to telephone the Pope to wish him 'Happy Valentine's Day' (Kononenko 2003b) and his lack of intelligence is demonstrated further when he is found telephoning local schools to ask whether any of the pupils have Georgian sounding surnames. He is interrupted by Nikolai Patrushev, Head of the FSB, who tells him that terrorists have hijacked an aeroplane and are making a 'Kamikadze' flight straight for the Kremlin. Putin repeats 'Kamikadze' and adds it to his list of Georgian deportees (Kononenko 2006b). Although Kononenko may cast Putin in the role of the fool, the associations with the 'Ivan the fool' character in Russian folktales cannot be missed. In many of the fairy tales that feature such a character, it often transpires that 'the fool' is somehow right in his actions and everything happens for the best.

However, Putin appears no more foolish than other world leaders, particularly George Bush, who does not know that Russia has been a country for more than one hundred years (Kononenko 2006c) and who takes great delight in wearing Saddam Hussein's old shoes (Kononenko 2004a). Kononenko suggests that international relations are being decided based on childhood games. In one sketch Putin receives a phone call from Mikhail Saakashvili, the Georgian president, who says 'Zhe-5'. It transpires that the two of them are playing a game of *Battleships* and making demands on the basis of whether or not they successfully hit a ship.⁷⁷ In this instance Saakashvili misses and Putin requests that the Embassy should no longer be surrounded (Kononenko 2006d). Just as Bykov suggests that Putin hoped to promote Russia against the West, Kononenko's Putin recognises the failings of the other heads of state and sees the potential for exploiting them, reasserting Russia's position on the world stage, albeit through relatively untraditional means.

⁷⁷ *Battleships* is a guessing game played by two people. Before play begins, each player arranges a number of ships secretly on the grid for that player. The game then proceeds with each player announcing a target square in the opponent's grid. If there is a ship in the square then this registers as a hit, if there is not, then play continues.

The implication that Putin is no worse a leader than other heads of state and that he might be a leader to whom the Russian population can look up is reinforced by the sketches that portray Putin as the only sane person in the presidential administration. Those employed in his presidential administration cause him embarrassment and their actions leave Putin wondering how these people have achieved positions of relative power. The sketch in which Putin is seen handing over control of the Kurile Islands to the Japanese demonstrates the inability of Putin's staff to accomplish a task without making a mistake. As Putin and the Japanese Prime Minister walk along the beach, Putin's foot catches on a metallic object in the sand. On further inspection he sees the outline of the hatchway of a launching silo for an intercontinental ballistic missile. Putin looks at his administration team, who have put the entire scheme in jeopardy (Kononenko 2003c). Putin is equally alarmed when his Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, suggests that there should be a train derailment in a relatively unpopulated region, such as Tver, where there may be Chechen passengers on the train. This 'accident' will mean that the government is perfectly justified in making changes to the way in which the railways are run (Kononenko 2005b). The lack of sense displayed by Putin's administration suggests that without a strong leader at the helm, the country would be in danger of disintegrating, but that Putin is in a position to prevent such disasters.

Although Kononenko's Putin does not convince the reader of his ability to govern Russia, it is clear that Putin is striving to be a leader as widely recognised as Lenin or Stalin and that he views his time in power as an attempt to reform the system and return to a more Soviet method of leadership. Putin frequently dreams about life as it was in the Soviet era and he is visited by former Soviet leaders who make him promise that he will be a strong leader too and respect the old Soviet traditions (Kononenko 2003d). Putin's desire to establish himself as a leader comparable with Lenin and Stalin becomes clear when Putin daydreams about the lettering on Lenin's mausoleum one day reading 'Putin' (Kononenko 2003e). These wishes are revisited when he retrieves an old book with yellowing pages from his secret cupboard. On the cover, the words 'Lenin's plan' have been crossed out and replaced with 'Stalin's Plan'. Putin takes out his pen and makes a further amendment, changing the name 'Stalin' to 'Putin' (Kononenko 2007b). Further to his comments regarding Putin's aspiration to be a successor of Lenin and Stalin, Kononenko makes reference to elements of a Putin cult of personality. In an interview, Kononenko has observed that Putin has managed to turn himself into something of a trademark, hence Kononenko's constant reference to 'Vladimir

VladimirovichTM and his suggestion that any person on hearing the name Vladimir Vladimirovich thinks immediately of Putin, that he has 'privatised that name. Now you can't associate it with anyone else' (*The St Petersburg Times* 2004). Of course, Kononenko satirises this association with Putin's name. Putin demands to know of Dmitrii Kozak why he is called Dmitrii and not Vladimir (Kononenko 2003f). The reverence that people have for Putin's name is further satirised when Putin discovers that every person, place and object in the whole world has been changed to Putin in his honour (Kononenko 2007c). As seen in Teterin and Bykov, the use of real-life events is not unusual. In this instance, Kononenko is referencing the fiftieth birthday present that Putin received from the former deputy prime minister of Bashkortostan, Gabit Sabitov: 'three pages of text addressed to Putin made up only of words beginning with the letter P. [...] The text finishes with the sentence, "*Po planete postavlyat pamyatniki Pervomu Prezidentu Planety Putinu*" ('All across the planet they will put up monuments to the first president of the planet, Putin.') (O'Flynn 2008). Kononenko perpetuates the notion that Putin has succeeded in establishing something of a personality cult, particularly as the sketches have continued to appear even though Putin has given up the presidency to Medvedev. Kononenko insists that he had already planned the vignette for Putin's last day in office: 'Vladimir Vladimirovich will go fishing. "He's always saying he wants to go, but he never gets to, so finally he will"' (cited in *The St Petersburg Times* 2004).

Arguably, Kononenko is not overly concerned about a Putin cult of personality, yet the way in which he links Putin to the former Soviet regime and the continuation of these sketches beyond the end of Putin's second term serve as a reminder to the population to be aware of Putin and his actions. The lack of political diversity in contemporary Russia is a theme which appears in Kononenko's sketches, just as it does in Teterin's plays and Bykov's fairy stories and Kononenko also focuses on the narrowness of the political spectrum in Russia. Kononenko raises the issue of the constitution, composing a song about the onward march of the third term and suggesting that 'even a weaver sometimes changes his pattern' and so a constitutional change should not necessarily be construed as problematic (Kononenko 2007d). In another sketch, Putin finds his administration hiding in a bunker waiting for the end of the world, otherwise known as March 2008 (Kononenko 2007e). However, Kononenko cannot resist satirising Putin's ideas about the consecutive third term. Putin lies sunbathing on the roof of the Kremlin thinking how nice it would be if he could stay there for the rest of his life, but then he recalls that he can only stay there until 2008 (Kononenko 2005c). To some, it seems

that the only way in which Putin will be persuaded to leave office is through bribery and success with such a scheme is almost achieved when Mikhail Kasyanov telephones Putin and offers him a fantastic dacha surrounded by forests, with oligarchs as next-door neighbours. The price for the dacha is the presidency: Kasyanov wants Putin to step down in 2008 so that he can become the president. Although Putin is tempted, he refuses Kasyanov's offer and telephones the attorney general, who suggests that there may be a way for Putin to acquire such a dacha without having to agree to Kasyanov's terms (Kononenko 2005d). The lack of political diversity in Russia is exemplified when Putin and Surkov attempt to find a new name for their political party: they are only able to think of names and ideas that have been used by other parties already. The fact that they can only think up names that are simply variations on party names that are in existence implies that there is very little difference across the political spectrum and Putin's favourite suggestion *PZhR*, which sounds like *pozhar* (the Russian for fire) is reminiscent of Lenin's terminology creating a 'spark' for revolution among the workers (Kononenko 2006e). Concerns about freedom are reflected when Putin is awoken by something which sounds like a swarm of bees. It transpires that the noise is being made by hundreds of aircraft flying from Ukraine. On phoning Surkov, Putin discovers that the aircraft represent freedom and that Kiev has already succumbed. Now it is Russia's turn. Needless to say, Putin is horrified and goes cold at the prospect (Kononenko 2005e). Although Kononenko depicts Putin as something of a fool at times, he mocks him gently, characterising Putin as no worse than those around him, both within his own government and in an international setting. The use of real events encourages the readership to think differently about Putin and prevents the vignettes simply from being read as farcical stories written only to make people laugh.

Conclusions

Arguably, it is texts of this type that have the greatest impact on the reader, as they offer a considered evaluation of Putin and the post-Yeltsin era. Although all three authors emphasise different aspects of Putin's presidency and his actions, the key elements evident in each author's texts reflect the factors that have been outlined in the earlier part of this chapter. The tightening of media control, which has damaged the political diversity of Russia and the idealised image of Putin, unsettle all three writers. Furthermore, all three authors seek to reinforce the notion that Putin is just an ordinary man – an image that the Kremlin PR machine also wished to promote. However, the Kremlin sought to use the image of Putin as 'one of the people' so he

would be able to carry out the reforms and policies that he wanted, without any interruption. This representation of Putin conflicts with the image that is portrayed in the case studies, which aim to remind the Russian population that Putin should not be glorified and elevated above his station, that he is 'ordinary' and as a consequence, he alone cannot be the solution to all of Russia's difficulties, despite what the media say. The absence of complete political representation also features as a primary concern for these writers, but the reasons for the lack of political diversity are attributed to different factors. For Bykov, the onus is on the population to prevent the permeation of Putin into every avenue of politics until he becomes the sole representative of the people. In contrast, Teterin and Kononenko highlight the way in which Putin's administration influences how people think and they give substantial coverage to 'alternatives' to Putin. Perhaps what is most significant is that none of these authors promotes Putin or overtly contributes to his cult of personality. Arguably, Teterin is the most critical of Putin and his actions and he becomes more so in his second play *Preemnik.doc* (2007). Kononenko's gentle mockery and Bykov's ironic fairy stories can hardly be evaluated as stinging satire that undermines Putin, yet they do not heap praise on Putin or ignore his shortcomings. What is also interesting is that none of these authors satirises the Putin cult. It may be that none of the writers believes that the Putin cult has any great influence over the population and does not need to be defused in the same way as the Stalin cult. In her assessment of the Stalin cult, Sarah Davies suggests that a number of techniques were used to subvert the cult, variations of which seem relevant to the question of the Putin personality cult. She says that in the

'indirect ways of subverting the leadership [...] all the characteristics of the cult were overturned. Where the official cult was serious, the unofficial images were comic; where the official cult denied the existence of a private life to the leaders, the unofficial images concentrated on their personal, human details; where the official cult portrayed the cult as permanent, the unofficial images stressed the transitory nature of the leadership' (1997, p.175).

Although there are some minor differences it seems that there is a long tradition of how to subvert a personality cult in Russia, which is being followed quite closely by all three writers.

CONCLUSIONS

In the post-Soviet era it appears that literature has retained its function as a political tool. The Kremlin is concerned about the representation of Putin in the media and so endeavours to exercise significant control over the information that is made available to the wider public. In addition, the Putin-era leadership recognised the value that literature held for conveying the appropriate message about the new president. In this sense it seems that little has changed between the Bolsheviks' employment of literature and the post-Soviet use of the same medium as a method for influencing the masses. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, writers have also continued to use literature as a means of supporting or countering the state and its views. However, what is most significant is the contrast between the post-Soviet Yeltsin era and the post-Soviet Putin era. For many, the collapse of the USSR initially represented the end of a political function for literature; they believed that there would no longer be a need for Aesopian language to discuss the failings of the regime and without suppression by the state some writers lost their impetus. However, since Putin's arrival in power, there has been a relative tightening of the system and media and literature have been re-appropriated for use by the state. These actions have re-awoken former sentiments that literature can provide an alternative forum for political comment and, reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn, who states that 'for a country to have a great writer is like having another government' (1968, p.359), in some instances, it seems that literature is the only arena in which certain critical comments can be made.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RISE OF POPULAR LITERATURE AND THE DECLINE OF THE WRITER'S STATUS

The popular literary genres have enjoyed commercial success since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but they have also been on the receiving end of critical condemnation as those associated with reviewing Russia's literary output believed such texts to represent the death of Russian literature. The rising status of popular genres has made celebrities out of some writers, while other authors have felt the pinch of a competitive market economy. This chapter will explore the commercial aspect of popular literature, it will examine whether these types of text have a role to play in the education of readers and it will investigate the critical assessment of the popular literary genres. In addition, it will examine how the commercialisation of literature has affected writers, whether the writer continues to have a role as a teacher to his or her readers and it will discuss the critical reaction to writers of these texts.

The case studies in this chapter are Boris Akunin and his series *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-) and Oksana Robski and her novels *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual 2* (2007).⁷⁸ Both of these authors have enjoyed notable successes in terms of the publicity that their works have generated and the significant incomes that they have produced. In spite of their comparable successes on the Russian literary scene, the reason for choosing these two authors lies also in their differences. Boris Akunin is the pseudonym of Grigory Chkhartishvili, a relatively well-known and respected former editor of *Inostrannaya literatura* (1994-2000), an expert on Japanese culture and language and the writer of a 'serious' literary tome, *Pisatel i samoubiistvo* (*The Writer and Suicide* (1999)). Oksana Robski's texts have been written and published in the twenty-first century, without any embarrassment at writing works aimed at making money.

⁷⁸ All quotations from Akunin's series *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-) and from Robski's novel *Ca\$ual* (2005) are taken from the translations currently available in English, which are referenced in the bibliography. Translated quotations from Robski's second novel *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) are my own.

POPULAR LITERATURE AND THE ROLE OF THE WRITER IN THE SOVIET ERA

The assertion that the 1990s were the first decade in which popular literature gained a foothold on the Russian literary scene (Olcott 2001, p.2) is inaccurate. Popular literature did not emerge solely in the post-Soviet era. It is now more widely acknowledged that popular literature was in existence prior to 1917 and that the Soviet period, while an interruption to the 'normal' progression of such genres, did not entirely destroy the genre. To understand how popular literature continued to enjoy some sort of existence, albeit in a form peculiar to the Soviet system and to appreciate the position that writers found themselves in after 1917, it is necessary to offer a brief outline of the literary situation prior to the Revolution before examining how this changed in the Soviet era. This section will look first at the fate of popular literature and will then explore the role of the writer in Russia under Soviet rule.

THE FATE OF POPULAR LITERATURE

Both Brooks (2003) and Lovell (2005) point out that as early as the 1800s writers were trying to decide whether they should be producing literature that the general public wanted to read. As noted in the 'Introduction' to this thesis, Pushkin himself was torn over whether he should expect payment for the work that he produced and he was drawn into commercial struggles with other writers of the age, most notably Faddei Bulgarin, who produced Russia's first bestselling novel, *Ivan Vyzhigin*, in 1829, which 'offer[ed] the reader satisfying solidarity with the narrator's values' (Lovell 2005, p.15). However, Bulgarin was to learn a hard lesson when it came to producing a popular novel relying on a recognisable formula. Lovell suggests that 'formulas are likely to lose their force rather quickly as the character of the audience changes' (2005, p.16) and from the 1830s the demands placed on the writer by the Russian reading public did begin to change. Koreneva points out that by the 1870s Russia had crime novels of its own and although they were somewhat different from the crime genre as it is today, the crime stories of the late nineteenth century were primarily concerned with an offence committed against the customary, accepted norms that usually saw the perpetrator punished (Koreneva 2005, p.59).

In the same way that Pushkin's works were discussed in the context of the debate surrounding 'popular' and 'high' literature at the beginning of the 1800s, so too were texts by 'serious' writers towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Lovell argues that Dostoevsky could not have written much of

Prestuplenie i nakazanie (1866, *Crime and Punishment*) ‘without [his] close acquaintance with the boulevard press of the time’ (2005, p.19), and that while Tolstoy might have meant *Kreutzerova sonata* (1889, *The Kreutzer Sonata*) to have been a ‘serious polemic against [...] the destructive moral effect of sexual relationships [...] his contemporaries [...] saw it as a compelling and fast-paced account of pathological jealousy and violence (2005, p.20). The appearance of elements from popular literature in writing by ‘serious’ authors caused the intelligentsia, which viewed itself as having a ‘civilising mission’ (Lovell 2005, p.11), a great deal of consternation, as did the emergence of ‘middlebrow’ literature in the late 1880s, which seemed to bridge some of the gaps between high literature on the one hand and mass literature on the other. This sensationalist literature concerned the intelligentsia and they failed to recognise that this ‘middlebrow’ literature not only entertained its readers, it adhered to the dictates of social engagement, and also offered some moral and practical guidance (Lovell 2005, p.21).⁷⁹

Needless to say, those trying to protect the interests of ‘high’ culture supported the Soviet campaign against sensationalist literature. However, the Soviet leadership understood that culture could be used as a means to educate the population and they recognised that there were elements from popular literature which ought to be preserved to make Soviet literature more appealing to the readership; thus the ‘Sovietisation’ of popular literary genres occurred, making Stalin’s introduction of Socialist Realism in the 1930s possible. Although some elements from popular literary genres were allowed to remain, it was clear that there was only limited scope for the genres of popular literature as understood in the Western sense. Yet, in their eagerness to eradicate any distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature, the Soviet leadership had ostensibly come up with a formula – Socialist Realism – the tenets of which authors had to follow if they entertained any idea of seeing his or her work published.

Quite clearly then, the driving force behind the production of mass literature was the fundamental difference between the Western and Soviet variants. In the West, market forces dictated that writers of popular fiction sought to produce a text that

⁷⁹ See Marsh, ‘Anastasiia Verbitskaia reconsidered’ (1996, p.184), in which she suggests that one of the reasons why Anastasia Verbitskaya (1861-1928) was condemned by critics was because of the phenomenal success of her texts, which ‘played a progressive role in the Russian women’s movement, even if they were not “great art”’.

appealed to many readers, whereas the motivation for producing a 'popular' text in the Soviet Union was the 'goal of moral improvement through reading' (Lovell 2005, p.35), both in terms of the content and the structure, and aimed to reinforce the ideals that the Soviet leadership wished to promote. In the West, popular literature is not always associated with the aim of morally improving its reader, although there are writers, such as P.D. James or Ruth Rendell, whose texts are an exploration of the more complex side of human nature. In addition, writers of popular literature in the West tended to be extremely concerned about the market and the demands of their readers. The Stalin era clearly contributed to the confused understanding of what popular literature was and what relation it bore to the literary canon. On one hand, Stalin rejected all notions of popular literature as a negative Western phenomenon, but on the other, he wished to create a type of formula literature that would appeal to as many readers as possible.⁸⁰

The relaxation of socialist realist norms under Khrushchev, commonly referred to as the 'thaw', meant that some previously banned or censored works could be published and this has further influenced the canonical debate among today's critics.⁸¹ This 'returned literature' was joined by more, previously unpublished works in the late 1980s (see 'Not Just a 'Thick' Journal', p.115 for definition of 'returned literature'). This is not to suggest that the 'returned literature' was necessarily of a popular genre, but to illustrate that the publication of these texts so long after they were originally written has given critics and readers a distorted picture of Russia's literary history, particularly in the post-Soviet era and not least because a large number of these works were published without any kind of introduction to provide context. The abundance of 'returned literature' in the late 1980s and early 1990s also gave a sense that this period was particularly rich in works of literary quality, even though some of these works had been written almost seventy years earlier. Arguably, this meant that works written in the late 1980s and early 1990s did not receive the critical acclaim that they deserved because they were overshadowed by newly published texts from the previous seventy years.

⁸⁰ See Lovell, 'Reading the Russian Popular' (2005, pp.22-27) for details of the popular elements that continued to appear in the literature of the Soviet period.

⁸¹ See Latynina, 'Sumerki literary' (2001) for details of her struggle to understand the position and function of literature in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

Irrespective of the confusion that the limits of Socialist Realism and the abundance of 'returned literature' had on the Russian literary scene, in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, literary critics and the Russian intelligentsia were convinced that the reading public would embrace 'high' literature. They were certainly not expecting the arrival of capitalism to bring its 'favourite child: pop culture' (Azhgikhina 1993) along with it. However, they had not anticipated the impact that the free market would have on publishers or the fact that, in contrast with the Soviet period, they needed to sell the works that they published. For a time, the best-selling books were translations of foreign adventure, crime, or detective stories, which no doubt gave rise to the erroneous idea that popular genres had been absent in Soviet Russia. The popularity of these texts was partly due to the publisher's reluctance to print anything that might not sell well. The familiarity that Russian readers had with popular genres, albeit in the 'Sovietised' form, no doubt had an impact on the books that they chose to read after the USSR collapsed.

THE ROLE OF THE WRITER

The impact that the Soviet period had on the role of the writer and the mission with which writers were charged by the Soviet leadership is well documented. Yet some comment on the pre-revolutionary era is required to understand how writers in the years 1917-1991 found themselves held in such high regard by Soviet society. Just as intellectuals in the late 1700s and early 1800s were engaged in the debate about literature and its quality, so too were they concerned with nation-building and establishing something of a national identity. (For further discussion on the formation of national identity see 'Dmitrii Bykov: A Critical View of Putin or his People?' p.188.) Wachtel points out that in order to create some sort of national identity,

'elites [...] mobilised fellow citizens by using the person and the work of the national poet as a source of pride and a rallying point for future cultural and political development. The result was what can only be called a cult of national literature in general and of national poets in particular' (2006, p.15)

and he suggests that Soviet rulers used the adoration of writers as a means to strengthen their campaign (2006, p.26). Those writers who produced officially-sanctioned texts were the recipients of generous remuneration and were entitled to shop in places where traditionally hard-to-come-by goods were more freely available. Furthermore, they occupied what should have been a relatively well-respected position in society. However, being a writer in the Soviet Union was not

indicative of talent and being talented did not necessarily equate to greater financial rewards. Even the most average writer was certain of an above-average wage and other perks, simply for meeting the state's requirements on the production of literature. Of course, there were those who perceived these writers to have betrayed their principles in order to obtain a more comfortable lifestyle. What is less frequently recognised is that, owing to the strict regulation of literature, the production of 'underground' or *samizdat* texts was rife. Arguably, both groups of writers sought to educate the population: one group according to Soviet ideals, and the other, against.

Although writers enjoyed a privileged position throughout the Soviet era, there is little doubt that their views became increasingly important during the 1980s, particularly during the *glasnost* and *perestroika* years. For many people, the speed at which the country was changing was baffling and the information provided by the *publitsistika*, which could be written and published much faster than any book, was vital to the understanding of developments in the final years of the Soviet Union. Even though they achieved their aims, the increased prestige that accompanied their role in the late 1980s and first two years of the 1990s cannot but have had an impact on the way in which writers dealt with the post-1991 situation and the loss of recognition that they suffered: 'by the end of the 1990s this key figure in literary life had been replaced by the publisher' (Menzel 2005, p.39).

Conclusions

Although there is little doubt that the Soviet leadership had a significant influence over the content of literature, it is useful to remember that the period was marked by paradoxical rulings concerning acceptable material for publication. One of the primary aims of Socialist Realism was to create a literature that would not only appeal to the masses, but also educate them at the same time. It is perhaps unsurprising that in the early years of Soviet rule, the formulaic structure and storylines of Socialist Realism were sufficient to keep readers entertained, but that without some form of development in the longer term, it was to be expected that readers would become bored with the same stories. Furthermore, it is little wonder that writers could be convinced to adhere to the dictates of Socialist Realism. The prestige and privilege that they were afforded because of their commitment to the cause allowed them to feel needed. As Wachtel points out, the writer had 'now found his rightful place on earth. He [had] been restored to society' (2006, p.31). Arguably, this was also true for writers who could not bring themselves to write for

the state; he (or she) had found his (or her) rightful place too: in opposition to the state. It is evident that in spite of the Soviet leadership's attempts to exert strict control over literature and its production, the recognition of reader demand meant that there was some leniency. While control may not have been absolute, the power that the Soviet regime was able to exert was sufficient to fundamentally alter both the development of literature and the role of the writer, not only in the Soviet period, but also in the post-Soviet era too.

MAKING A LIVING FROM WRITING

The disintegration of the Soviet Union brought with it the end of the privileged existence that had been enjoyed by many writers. Even those writers whose literary talents were somewhat limited had been well provided for by a Soviet regime which had placed on a pedestal all those charged with the cultural education of the nation. When the USSR collapsed, the generous subsidies that had supported the writing industry came to an end and each writer found himself or herself in a new position: in order to make a living from his or her work, he or she had not only to write a text that readers wanted to read, but had to convince publishers to print the work in the first instance. The success of translations of Western popular genres prompted Russian writers to emulate the style of such texts. Arguably, the 'russification' of the popular genres has been responsible for both the rapid growth in popular literature in post-Soviet Russia and for the rise of the celebrity writer – a very different creature from the respected writer of the Soviet era. This section will explore the impact that the market has had on the types of literature produced and on those who produce it.

THE COMMERCIAL ASPECT OF POPULAR LITERATURE

The relative successes of the popular genres have prompted discussion among critics and academics, and have finally caused them to acknowledge that the assumptions regarding the emergence and dominance of 'high' literature in the early part of the 1990s were incorrect. In 'Chapter One: The Publishing Industry', this thesis establishes that works of fiction comprised between one-fifth and one-quarter of the total print run in the years 2001 to 2008, second only to texts in the category of education, culture and communications. In addition, fiction texts accounted for almost one-fifth of all the titles printed every year between 2001 and 2008, second only to political and socio-economic texts. While it is interesting that the publishing output for fiction remains high, there is no indication in these figures as to reader preference or to what types of text fall into the fiction category. There is also no indication of who may be reading these texts. Menzel suggests that in the immediate post-Soviet era, the number of people who never read a book was twenty-three per cent and that by 2002, this figure had climbed to forty per cent (2005, p.49). By 2008, the numbers claiming never to read had reached forty-six per cent. Although this figure is relatively high by Russian standards, the increase on the 2002 figure was small and there has been a notable decline in the numbers professing not to read fiction: the interviewees who assert that they never read

fiction more than halved between 2005 and 2008 from twenty per cent in 2005, to eight per cent in 2008 (Dubin and Zorkaya 2008).

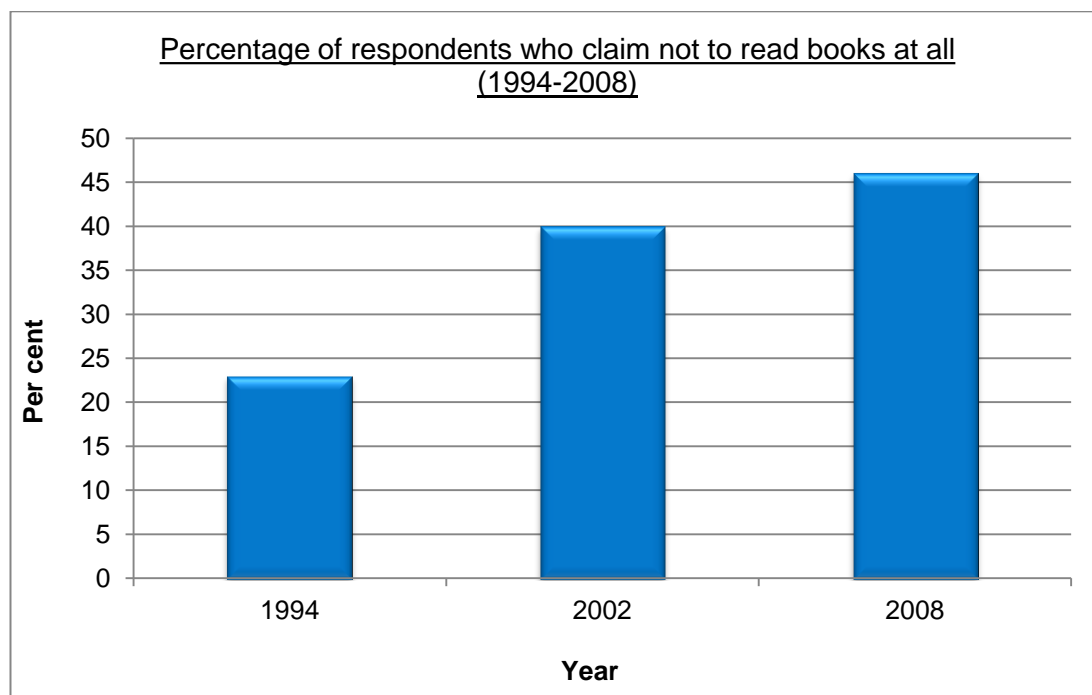


Figure 32: Percentage of respondents who claim not to read books at all (1994-2008)⁸²

In 1994, it was suggested that the most popular texts were detective fiction, preferred by twenty-six per cent of readers, closely followed by the categories of romance and historical novels, both preferred by twenty-three per cent of readers and science fiction or fantasy, preferred by eleven per cent of respondents (Menzel 2005, p.49). These figures were replicated in 2000, with preferences for detective fiction at twenty-nine per cent, romance and historical novels at twenty-four per cent and followed by science fiction or fantasy at fifteen per cent.

Interest in the types of texts preferred by readers has continued throughout the 2000s. In 2005 and 2008 Dubin and Zorkaya carried out surveys into reading habits which sought to identify which texts readers liked best. Dubin and Zorkaya (2008) offered respondents twenty-one different types of fiction from which to select their favourites. Among those questioned in 2005 and 2008, the most widely preferred types of fiction were the Russian *boeviki* or action thriller, the *zhenskii detektiv*, *zhenskaya proza* or romance, historical adventure novels, contemporary historical

⁸² Figures for 1994 and 2002 taken from Menzel (2005, p.49) and figures for 2008 taken from Dubin and Zorkaya (2008).

novels and Soviet classics, and apart from contemporary historical novels, each of these types of text listed in the top six witnessed an increase in the number of respondents who cited it as one of their preferred genres.⁸³

However, in 2008, the *zhenskii detektiv* had replaced the Russian *boevik* as the most widely preferred fiction material, seeing an increase of eight per cent. Classic foreign detective stories, stories about World War II and epic Soviet novels also saw significant increases in the percentage of readers preferring to read such texts between 2005 and 2008.

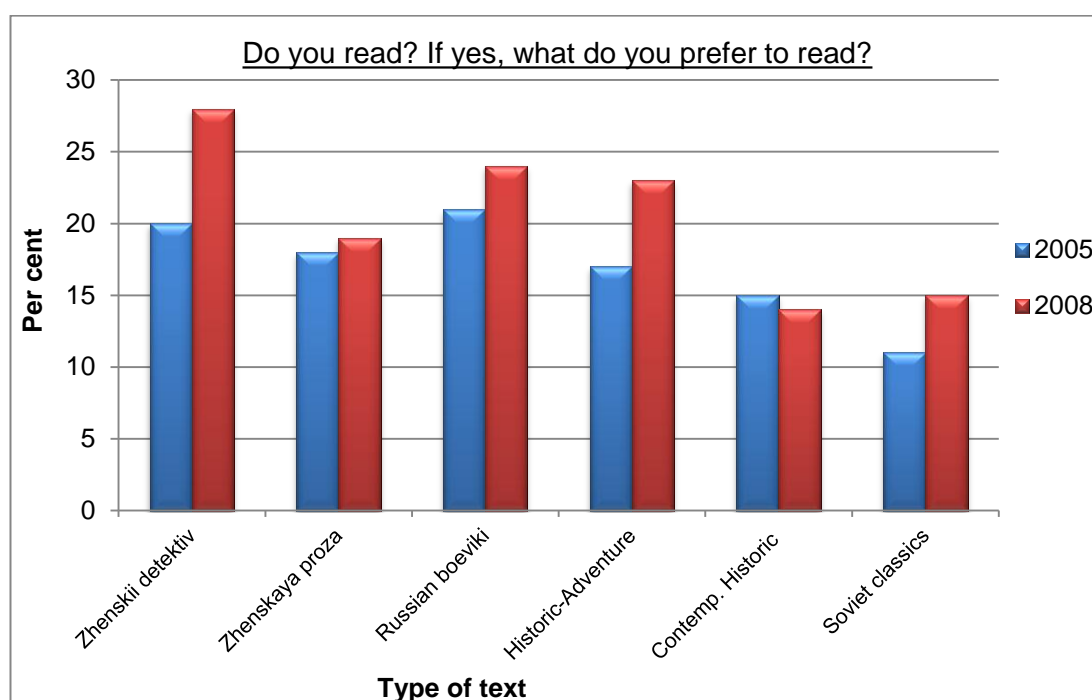


Figure 33: ‘Do you read? If yes, what do you prefer to read?’ (Dubin and Zorkaya 2008). (NB. Respondents were able to select more than one type of preferred text, so numbers total more than one hundred.)

In 2008, books about the Afghan and Chechen wars, literature of the former republics and other peoples of Russia and fashionable ‘glamour’ literature were

⁸³ See Koreneva, ‘Russian Detective Fiction’ (2005, p.86) who notes that many of these popular fiction genres are particularly appropriate for serialisation. ‘By establishing the “series” format so firmly in readers’ minds, publishers guarantee the commercial success of any text that fits the set model. [...] The principle of “seriality” served as orientation for readers who did without the services of literary critics’. The value of serialising works was discussed at relative length in the chapter on the publishing industry and so will not be revisited in this chapter.

added to the list of texts from which readers could choose. Although the percentage of respondents who name such texts as among their favourites is relatively small, the appearance of these types of text within the fiction genre suggests that the canon is not static and that the subjects about which authors write evolve over a relatively short time. The absence in the 2005 and 2008 surveys of the generic term *detektiv*, which Menzel quotes as being preferred by twenty-six per cent of readers in 1994 and twenty-nine per cent in 2000, further reflects the way in which the popular literary canon varies. In the 2005 and 2008 surveys there is no single response for *detektiv*; instead it has been split into multiple categories (Russian *boevik*, *zhenskii detektiv*, classic foreign detective stories and new Western detective stories) with differing levels of popularity among readers. Such a distinction in the later surveys demonstrates the way in which the genre is developing. In addition, it is interesting to note that while new *Western* detective novels feature in the list offered by Dubin and Zorkaya (2008) of preferred genres, new *Russian* detective stories do not. Arguably, this is because Russian detective stories have evolved into the *boevik* and *zhenskii detektiv* as two distinct sub-genres perhaps enjoyed by two different sorts of reader.

Dubin and Zorkaya's 2008 survey highlights anomalies that may not be expected in the light of anecdotal evidence about the most popular genres. In comparison with Menzel's figures for 1994 and 2000, there are significant differences between the popularity of romance: twenty-three per cent and twenty-four per cent respectively compared with eighteen per cent in 2005 and nineteen per cent in 2008.⁸⁴ It could be suggested that the split in the *detektiv* genre is partly responsible for the drop in those claiming to prefer romance. It has been observed that many of the *zhenskii detektiv* incorporate elements of both the detective and the romance genres and this blurring of genre boundaries has led some readers away from romance towards the *zhenskii detektiv*. Having witnessed the success of translated popular literature in the early 1990s and seen the popular genres evolve into Russia-specific variations, it is unsurprising that many authors have attempted to replicate these texts with the hope of achieving large-scale success.

⁸⁴ Unfortunately Menzel does not disclose the number of people who were questioned in the survey that she quotes, so some care must be taken when making comparisons between the answers of her respondents and those of Dubin and Zorkaya (2008).

SELLING ONE'S SOUL TO THE DEVIL: THE WRITER OF POPULAR LITERATURE

Ivanova (2003) notes, 'the status of writers has fallen so much' and as they appeared no longer to be 'in demand as the voice of conscience' (Wachtel 2006, p.5), any satisfaction the writer may have felt with the progress of democracy was soon succeeded by the realisation that it was necessary to find new ways of making money from his or her work. Wachtel asserts that writers had to adapt quickly to the new situation and he suggests that writers 'began to search for innovative solutions. Some involved leaving the world of literature, [but] depending on circumstance, education, and reputation, writers employed a variety of strategies to convert symbolic cultural capital into positions in politics, journalism, or the private sphere' (2006, p.6). Akunin also recognised the need for the writer to re-evaluate their artistic sensibilities in the light of the need to make a living. He observes that writers in the post-Soviet era had three choices: to change their profession, to continue writing 'high' literature which would not be read, or to find a middle ground between these two extremes (Akunin cited in Menzel 2005, p.46). However, he acknowledges that none of these options is likely to make a writer entirely happy and he argues that in order to earn a living from writing, the compromise is to write well, but for a mass audience – something, which on the surface, appears to be an oxymoron for many Russian writers. Further to the suggestions made by both Akunin and Wachtel, Menzel helpfully identifies three 'characteristic elements' that new Russian writers should have. The

'first [is] *professionalisation*; [the] second, and deliberately connected with this, [is] an orientation towards commercial *success*; [the] third, [is] a *playful and parodic authorial persona*' (Menzel 2005, p.47).

The first two characteristics that an author should ideally possess are clearly linked to the changes that occurred with the arrival of the capitalist market. In order for a writer to make money from his or her works, it became necessary to treat the art of writing as a job. Of course, one of the biggest challenges that a writer faced was ensuring that he or she received sufficient payment for the texts that he or she produced. In the Soviet era the average monthly salary was approximately 180 roubles. The standard fee a writer received for publishing a novel was 8,000 roubles (Wachtel 2006, p.31).⁸⁵ Clearly, writers were accustomed to receiving extremely

⁸⁵ See Walker *Soviet book publishing policy* (1978, p.xi, pp.72-75 and appendix 1), for a detailed explanation of how authors were paid and how much they received for their texts in the Soviet period. Payment was made based on the type of work and then on the *avtorskii list* (author's sheet), which was 40,000 typographical units of text.

generous payments for their work, so the shock of being paid at market rate was inevitably great. The third characteristic that Menzel declares any writer should have is the '*authorial persona*' (2005, p.47). Publishers in the post-Soviet era soon realised that readers were interested in *who* was writing the books that were appearing on the shelves, and if they were to part with their hard-earned cash, they wanted to know what credentials these writers possessed. Publishers began to provide 'certain basic but highly significant information [about their authors]: their education, their occupation, a short list of their works' (Koreneva 2005, p.85). One of the most successful writers whose personal biography has lent weight to her authority as a writer is Aleksandra Marinina. Her background in the Russian security services has informed the content of her novels and ensures that her descriptions of the work that her heroine, Anastasia Kamenskaya, encounters are accurate.

Publishers also recognised that reader choice was based on familiarity with an author's name. As a result, some publishing houses employ 'teams' of writers who all produce texts under the same pseudonym, giving the impression that a particular writer is extremely prolific. It has even been claimed that Marinina is simply the 'front-woman' for the texts featuring Kamenskaya and that there is a whole group of authors who actually produce her detective stories (Koreneva 2005, p.86). Proof that the author's name is of significant value to a publisher is further illustrated by the emergence of 'literary twins', whereby an author has left a publishing house, only to discover that the publishing house, which owns the rights to the author's name, has brought in a ghost writer to continue producing titles as if they were written by the same person (Koreneva 2005, p.86). The 'literary twin' emerges when the genuine author continues to write and begins to be published by a different publisher.

However, for many writers who believed in the superiority of their art, the appearance of the market and the notion of writing according to audience demands meant making a compromise. This concession was painful. Not only did an author have to accept that his or her work had a price (and perhaps a price lower than he or she might have liked), but he or she had to acknowledge that the sorts of texts that readers actually wanted were not necessarily of the very highest literary quality, i.e. popular literature. In addition, writers had to endure a change in social status. Those readers who wanted to read high-quality prose were not sufficient in numbers to sustain the entire population of 'serious' writers and little respect was afforded to any writer who produced literature 'for the masses'. It was this decision that proved

to be so difficult for many writers who felt that to bow to market demands and write popular literature was an acknowledgment that commercial forces had won. Wachtel suggests that the 'prestige of serious writing did not evaporate completely' (2006, p.6) and he argues that the 'respect for literature and its producers had been inculcated in the population at large for many years, and this did not disappear quickly' (2005, p.6). However, it could be argued that the respect for literature and its producers has remained. What has changed is the reason why a writer enjoys the respect of readers. The emergence of popular literature and the desire demonstrated by publishers to promote their authors as much as the texts that they produce has led to a different form of status for those writers who are truly successful – that of 'celebrity'.

Conclusions

The commercial value of popular literature and of those who write popular texts cannot be underestimated. Many readers claim only to read fiction texts, thus a comprehensive knowledge of the sorts of fiction texts that they most prefer is imperative for any writer who is hoping to make an adequate income from writing. In spite of any misgiving that some writers have concerning the content of the works that are popular with readers, it seems that any denial that literature is subject to the impulses of the free market is beginning to pass and those writers who are not comfortable employing their skills to produce a (perceived) lower-quality text prefer to consider alternative occupations. Of course, for many critics and academics, the departure of formerly well-respected writers to new professions has caused some degree of anguish and the abundance of popular literature, apparently at the expense of 'high' literature, has prompted some to assert that nothing of quality has been written since 1991 (Latynina 2001), much to the detriment of the reading public's education.

TO EDUCATE OR TO ENTERTAIN?

It was recognised in the section on popular literature and the role of the writer in the Soviet era that literature could be a means of educating the population and while texts should provide a certain degree of entertainment, this 'entertainment' should be constructive in nature. Reading was a regime-endorsed pastime, but it was not necessarily to be enjoyed in the same way that reading in a non-Soviet state was enjoyed. For women in particular, reading was about personal improvement for the greater good. Cherniak points out that 'Soviet women were supposed to dedicate themselves to the cause of socialist construction, not to their own emotional and sexual drives. Women's primary loyalty was to the collective or to their family, not to themselves' (2005, p.152). The fact that readers were meant to be reading for more than just entertainment meant that works of literature were written according to similar criteria, ensuring that the reader received the appropriate message and was educated in the spirit of socialism. Such requirements prompted Evtushenko to suggest that 'a poet in Russia is more than a poet' (cited in Vishevsky 2001, p.733) and Anatoly Vishevsky argues that such a sentiment is applicable 'even to the authors of contemporary Russian detective stories' (2001, p.733). This section will explore whether Russian writers have moved away from the production of texts that offer advice, or whether the popular genres of the post-Soviet era have been employed as a means to teach readers how to survive in the post-Soviet era.

ENTERTAINING AND INFORMATIVE

Shneidman argues that 'modern Russian literature informs and may even entertain the reader, but as opposed to classical Russian literature, it does not teach, inspire, or heal' (2005, p.15). In contrast, Olga Komarova claims that 'when people lose faith in the authorities and are disappointed with the social elite, mass culture provides them with the illusion that there is a solution to all their personal problems' (Chrenov cited in Komarova [n.d.] p.1) and she suggests that this is precisely what happened at the beginning of the 1990s. People were trying to understand how to succeed in post-Soviet Russia and

'after a long day of job hunting they turned to the kind of literature which did not demand concentration or intellectual effort. They wanted something which would give them relaxation and turn their thoughts away from the difficulties of everyday life' (Komarova [n.d.], p.1).

Although there is a high degree of truth in such an assumption, the escapism provided by popular literature seems not to have been the only reason why these popular genres were so widely read. Shneidman proposes that popular texts do not inspire or teach, but the contrary appears to be true. It may be that these types of text do not portray the sentiments traditionally associated with 'high' literature in the same way, but there is substantial evidence to suggest that many popular works written since 1991 deal with the same complex topics as 'high' literature, albeit in a more accessible way, and they aim to furnish their reader with the skills that are required in order to survive in post-Soviet Russia. Arguably, readers were not hoping to escape from the trials of everyday life, particularly in the early-1990s. Instead they hoped to find methods of coping with new situations. Vishevsky suggests that 'the new [post-Soviet] world brings something novel every day - yet it comes without an instruction book. That is, until now: one only needs to read Marinina's detective stories and everything becomes crystal clear' (2001, p.734). Marinina discusses 'phenomena previously ignored in popular literature' (Vishevsky 2001, p.734) and she covers a multitude of subjects from computer technology and cookery through to more intellectually demanding topics, including developments in medical research (Vishevsky 2001, p.735).

In addition to Marinina's discussion of a wide range of new skills and concepts that emerged in post-Soviet Russia, there is another fundamental characteristic of her writing that cannot be ignored: the protagonist of her detective stories is female. Literature for women was closely associated with the betterment of the nation and not for personal enjoyment or entertainment. Barbara Heldt observes that many female characters in 'classic' Russian literature written by men have been constructed as 'a marvellous given of nature, a being in whom not only her own and her family's future, but the future hope of Russia resides' (1987, p.12). In many cases these works were not written for women and they could not hope to achieve what Heldt has termed the 'terrible perfection' (1987, p.5) detailed in these texts. Furthermore, these texts were written by men in an attempt to define their own masculinity and as a result could not truly be considered writing for a female audience even if they were about women (Heldt 1987, p.2). With a few exceptions, there was a general absence of female authors writing about women in the Soviet period, a phenomenon which ceased only in the 1990s.⁸⁶ Dubin (personal interview

⁸⁶ See Cherniak, 'Russian Romantic Fiction' (2005, pp.151-172) for details of texts written by women for women during the Soviet period.

2007) has defined the *zhenskie detektivy*, or female detective stories, as a 'softer variation' of the sorts of *detektivy* that appeared in the early part of the 1990s and it is the way in which these texts '[confront] the anxieties and threats posed by the instability of life in Russia' (Theimer-Nepomnyashchy 1999, p.182) that draws readers toward them. Marinina is not alone in her creation of a strong female protagonist who experiences the evolving world of post-Soviet Russia along with her readers. Koreneva (2005) identifies three main character types that are found in the *zhenskie detektivy*. She argues that Marinina's heroine, who not only unravels the crime, but also explores and investigates the particular social problem that resulted in the perpetration of the crime in the first instance, is an example of the employee of the state security system (2005, p.87). Secondly, Koreneva (2005) identifies the woman private detective who features in Marina Serova's works. In contrast to Marinina's heroine, the woman private detective is far more concerned with her appearance. According to Koreneva, details about the length of time Serova's heroine spends in the shower and looking in the mirror, the way that she applies her make-up and what she wears, are all described in depth (2005, p.89). Finally, there is the heroine depicted in Daria Dontsova's texts, the 'pure amateur', an ordinary member of the public who becomes interested in, and wants to help, the victim of the crime (Koreneva 2005, p.92). However, these variations in the personalities and lifestyles of the female protagonists are not about telling a different story; instead they increase the likelihood of a female reader finding a character with whom she can identify and provided methods for coping with life in a Russia that was unrecognisable.

Dubin (personal interview 2007) identifies the key components of the *zhenskie detektivy* genre as the issues that arise in the course of everyday life: the opportunities for finding a husband, creating a family and bringing up children. In his view, as a result of the trials of daily life, the heroine inevitably gets herself into a *kriminalnaya obstanovka* (a criminal situation) and the remainder of the story is devoted to how, using her female strengths, she is able to extract herself from this situation. The depiction in these *detektivy* of the ways in which the characters coped with the pressures and instability of the Yeltsin era was one of the fundamental reasons why women started to read these novels in the first instance (Dubin, personal interview 2007). In returning to Cherniak's point concerning the Soviet notion that women ought to be devoted to the collective or to their family, it is not surprising that people were even prepared to turn to literature in order to cope with the difficulties of day-to-day life in the 1990s. They had few other means of dealing

with the hardships that Yeltsin's reforms had thrust upon them and these texts were not so much about solving crimes as providing readers with a self-help manual on surviving the transition to the post-Soviet world.

Although Yeltsin is no longer in power and the old issues about stability and surviving from one day to the next have passed, the popularity of *zhenskie detektivy* has not decreased. However, according to Dubin (personal interview 2007), their role as 'self-help' manual may have been usurped by other genres. He also suggests that women in Moscow are no longer so worried about what to do if their wages are not paid or if there is uncertainty over housing – these fears have subsided thanks to the greater stability of the Putin era and other, more personal concerns, have taken over. Modern-day anxieties include retaining their female independence, where to meet a suitable husband and whether or not they meet the exacting standards of the capital's most fashionable citizens. Such issues are addressed by Russian romantic fiction in which the elements of 'self-help' are evident. Gudkov and Dubin (cited in Cherniak 2005, p.159) suggest that romantic fiction gives women the opportunity to 'test the limits of the permissible in the controlled and secure environment of an artificial world'. Further to this, Cherniak argues that some works of romantic fiction offer 'new norms for women's behaviour and identity' (2005, p.161). Titles include *The [Woman] Trader* and *The [Woman] Banker*, advertised as 'everything the reader needs to know about "women in the new Russia"' (Cherniak 2005, p.161). As if such advertising were not enough to make readers believe that they are learning about life in the new, capitalist Russia, then passages which echo popular articles on psychology and self-help manuals offer a stark contrast to the Soviet notion that women should work only for the collective:

'women's independence is not about empty chatter. I'm not trying to turn you into a feminist. But you mustn't forget about yourself. It is possible to have a happy family life and to keep your own personality. To do your own thing and earn your own money. Because material dependence really chains you down' (Mareeva cited in Cherniak 2005, p.190).

FROM SAGE TO CELEBRITY

Even before the dramatic rise in status granted to writers in the Soviet era, it was widely acknowledged that 'the Great Writer had been the highest authority' (Menzel 2005, p.39). Chuprinin has observed that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the

ability of any writer to sell his or her text solely on the strength of reputation has diminished significantly. He notes that there is always a new name in the bestseller spot and the occupation by a writer of the top spot lasts only a short time before he must give it up to the next 'hero of the day' (Chuprinin 2004a). The lengths to which writers and their respective publishers go in order to achieve the bestseller position are a new phenomenon in post-Soviet Russia. As previously discussed, the writer's personal biography plays a key role in raising the writer's profile among readers, yet this is not sufficient to guarantee high sales. The efforts to which the publishers of Eduard Bagirov's novel *Gastarbeiter* (2007) went in order to ensure that it achieved bestseller status, suggest that the use of advertising space on email provider *mail.ru* had been influential in promoting the book and helping it to reach the top spot (Anon, personal interview 2007).⁸⁷ The writer's need to remind readers who he or she is is further exemplified by the literary prize nominations. Although many writers may hope to win such a prize, the motivation for doing so in the 1990s and 2000s was very different from that of the Soviet period. To be awarded a literary prize during the Soviet era was often to see the addition of that particular work to the list of texts that would never be read again: the perception among readers was such that if the State recognised a text as noteworthy, then there could be nothing of value on its pages. In contrast, the desire to win a literary prize in the post-Soviet era is connected not only with a need to make money, but also serves to remind people about a particular text. Just as in the West, Chuprinin notes that 'to get onto the [short, or even the long] list means to remind people of yourself' (2004a) and this is what writers must do in order to sell their texts.

In addition to his or her role as the dispenser of wisdom and truth, a writer must also achieve celebrity status so that his or her comments on the 'right' way to live are read. Elena Apenko points out that 'strict morality is [a] fundamental rule of popular fiction' (2003) and that part of the formula in this type of fiction is to see the victory of 'good guys over bad ones' and to ensure that the moral balance is restored by the end of the text. The return to equilibrium is evident in many of the bestsellers that appear on the Russian literary scene. Marinina's novels may focus on the reasons why the crime was committed in the first instance (Koreneva 2005, p.88), but her novels usually conclude with the restoration of the moral order. Dubin

⁸⁷ Bagirov's novel, *Gastarbeiter* (2007), is a semi-autobiographical account of a young man arriving from Turkmenistan to earn a living in Moscow. His work is not always legal, but this is not something that causes him great consternation.

argues that many of the protagonists who feature in the *boeviki* (action thriller) have a strong sense of morality, even if their behaviour throughout the rest of the novel is violent: '[the hero] does not have any self-interest and seeks no personal advantage, either in monetary or status terms' (2005, p.106). Bagirov describes events in his novel with reference to an ethical code: arguing that despite the shady nature of some of Yevgeny's enterprises, he does have an inner moral compass: 'there are some moments in the book when he can make a lot of money by cheating someone but he doesn't do it [...] The book is about how a person tried to survive in Moscow but at the same time remain a human being, with a clean conscience' (Bagirov 2007). Apenko (2003) argues that these complex notions are often considered to be the content of 'high' literature rather than of popular texts, yet the fact that popular works contain such complicated ideas suggests that not only do readers continue to be concerned with such concepts, but also that writers feel the need to address them.

Conclusions

Although the primary concern for many writers and publishers in the post-Soviet era appears to be making as many sales as possible, the content of these works is not simply vacuous 'trash'. Shneidman argues that the popular literature of the 1990s and 2000s does not 'teach, inspire, or heal' (2005, p.15), yet such an assessment appears unfair. The popular literature that has emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union provides readers with details about life in a capitalist society, giving them the tools that they need in order to negotiate the Russia in which they now live. In addition to the practical advice that popular literature offers to readers, philosophical matters are also dealt with. Popular literature may not inspire readers in the same way as 'high' literature, yet its function as a means of creating a feeling of belonging to a certain group or society should not be underestimated in times as turbulent as the 1990s. For those feeling dislocated from their past, popular culture provided a frame of reference, often with a strong moral code, against which readers could evaluate their own behaviour and the actions of those around them. However much writers may argue that they are writing simply for entertainment, the content of the literature that is produced offers both practical and moral advice to the readership and notions about celebrity status which encourage readers to buy a particular author's book only compound the belief that writers have more to offer than escapism.

DOES POPULAR LITERATURE GENERATE DEBATE?

The decline and eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union fuelled the hopes of many readers, writers, critics and academics that with freedom would come even greater artistic achievements, not least in the field of literature. As Arch Tait points out, the late 1980s were 'euphoric' (1997, p.661) owing to the publication of the 'returned' works, which furthered the belief that Russian writers produced works of great literature and reinforced the idea that if censorship was finally removed then writers would be in a position to produce even better texts. For the majority of critics interested in Russian literature, this hope has not been realised, yet that has not prevented wide-ranging and varied commentaries on the position and quality of Russian literary output since 1991.⁸⁸ This section will explore how the discussion about literature has altered between 1996 and 2008 and whether any consensus on the 'great Russian novel of the twenty-first century' has been reached.

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC

The position of the literary critic has been jealously guarded in Russia; with many in the profession taking the view that only those with the right credentials should be invited to pass comment on whether a text is worth reading. Prior to 1991 the 'Soviet public [...] witnessed the unedifying spectacle of writers and critics setting themselves up in judgement on their fellows' (Marsh 1993, p.117) and in the post-Soviet era, the Russian public has watched writers and critics scramble to maintain some control over their former territory. The emergence of popular literary forms which have been embraced by the reading public also seem to have provided a new job opportunity: the critic of popular literature. Chuprinin observes that 'writers of criticism are still with us' and they are each trying to resist the 'erosion of the traditional literocentrism of [Russia] and the increasing power of the market place' (2004a). However, it appears that their efforts are in vain, not least because the internet allows any reader the opportunity to share his or her comments. Zassoursky observes that the online publication of literature and comments about literature occurred almost simultaneously with the growth of the internet in Russia. He highlights Maksim Moshkov's electronic library as one of the first online sources of literature, which is 'brought up to date once or twice a week with the help of users who post not only ideas ("what should be listed"), but also texts' (2001, p.164). The

⁸⁸ Andrei Nemzer is frequently quoted as being the only critic who takes a positive view of literature published in the post-Soviet era (Latynina 2001, Chuprinin 2004).

reader chooses his or her favourite texts and draws them to the attention of other users of the online library.

Just as the divide between 'high' literature and popular literature draws its distinction from the marketability of a text, so too does criticism. Dubin (personal interview 2007) notes that for the reader of popular literature, what is often most important when selecting a text is that it has been deemed part of the canon of 'fashionable' literature. In contrast, 'traditional' criticism is 'by definition "non-market," since it speaks – whether with writers or with readers – in the name of Literature' (Chuprinin 2004a). This could be considered one of the fundamental reasons why readers are turning away from the 'traditional' critic: not only do they want literature to speak for itself; they do not want a categorical explanation from a critic that this *is* what a text means. Chuprinin (2004a) goes one step further and suggests that the proliferation of critical assessments in all manner of publications from newspapers to 'glossy' magazines, not to mention the internet, means that every reader is able to find a critic whose tone and opinions reinforce his or her own. Furthermore, the online nature of some criticism now means that the reader could actively engage and pass his or her own comment on what reviewer said, a concept which would not sit comfortably with the 'traditional' critic. Whether in practice this actually happens to any notable level is not something this thesis has investigated. However, Chuprinin (2004a) makes the somewhat surprising assertion that reader engagement with critics is unlikely given that there is a general reluctance on the part of the population to think. It could be argued that his statement is unfair given the continued engagement of many readers with different types of text (as reflected in the diversity of the books that are now published in post-Soviet Russia) and the sustained interest in the works published and recommended by the 'thick' journals. Perhaps Chuprinin's allegation is reasonable only if the post-1991 period is compared with the Soviet era; people who once would have been avid readers have since found other ways to spend their leisure time, thus decreasing the amount of time that would previously have been dedicated both to reading and engagement with critical commentary.

The power of the book market and the immediacy with which some criticism appears (at the click of a button if it is online) means that Russian literary criticism has altered remarkably as a result of the rise of popular literature. Although Chuprinin despairs at the loss of criticism as a key component of the 'literary process' which is about the 'longterm [sic] interaction of writers, books and

tendencies of various sorts' (2004a) he does not fail to recognise that the books that 'traditional critics' review are not generally representative of the types of texts that readers of popular literature are likely to enjoy. His conclusion that the general message in all critical articles is 'this book has been published; is there a reader somewhere waiting for it?' (2004a), which reveals far more about the critics' concerns over the fate of literature rather than who has the 'right' to write about it.

THE SEARCH FOR THE 'GREAT RUSSIAN NOVEL' OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The belief that Russian writers still possess the capacity to produce 'great literature' has not been diminished by the dominance of popular literature on the shelves of many bookshops. Critics remain convinced that each decade should generate at least one text that surpasses all the other works published around the same time. The proliferation of literary prizes in the post-Soviet era is testament to this continued search for 'great literature'. There are a number of well-known, relatively high-profile prizes, including the Booker-Open Russia, the Anti-Booker, the Pushkin Prize and the National Bestseller Prize, not to mention numerous smaller prizes that are often awarded in conjunction with one or other of the literary journals or large publishing houses, such as the Ivan Petrovich Belkin Prize. It is perhaps unsurprising that the appearance of the Booker Prize on the Russian literary scene in 1992 was not without comment. In the first few years of its award, Western Slavonic Studies specialists were invited to sit on the committee with a view to ensuring some degree of neutrality (Thomson [n.d.]). By the mid-1990s, a management committee of solely Russian writers, publishers and critics was established, though this did not necessarily make any of the decisions about prize winners less controversial (Thomson [n.d.]). Since then the number of literary prizes has continued to grow, which might lead to the assumption that such an accolade guarantees increased sales for, and interest in, the winning writer. In reality, the impact of winning a literary prize is rather limited. Some may question whether it is worth the effort of awarding prizes when the outcome has 'a very limited influence on sales figures and the size of print runs of books' (Ivanova 2003). However, the well-rehearsed answer to this is, as Ivanova (2003) asserts, that the prizes 'serve as organizers of the literary process' and 'remind the public of the very existence of literature [and] reassert the prestige of literature'. Such attitudes are reminiscent of the days when a certain level of prestige was associated with writing. Nowadays, such sentiments do not provide an adequate income for many authors. In addition, Ivanova argues, the prize winners and those who make the short-lists will be read in the future when a Russian 'middle-class' becomes firmly established and there is a

demand for an alternative to works by Marinina and Dontsova. If such an assessment is correct, it prompts the question, why spend time and effort awarding prizes if critics and readers are indifferent to the result? Ivanova (2003) once again has an answer to this, arguing that 'the writer awarded a prize is part of some real literary excitement, the fellowship of the awarders and the awarded' (2003), which ties in with Bourdieu's notion that there are some writers who are interested primarily in producing works that are of interest only to other writers rather than to a larger reading public. In contrast to Ivanova, Dubin suggests that the literary prizes can have a genuine impact on what readers choose to purchase, arguing that 'the most important thing required to qualify as *glamurnoe chtenie* is to be the recipient of a good prize which is known to the reader: the Booker, Big Book, or National Bestseller – something along these lines' (2007), which appears contrary to many of the other critical assessments of the literary prizes. However, Dubin's article (2007) has been published more recently than those by Ivanova (2003), Latynina (2001) and Chuprinin (2004a), so it is very possible that there has been a shift towards a more middle-class readership which is interested in the prize winners, as was predicted by Ivanova in 2003.

The literary prizes also offer a starting point from which some critics have attempted to identify the 'Great Russian novel' of the twenty-first century. Latynina's (2001) somewhat negative conclusion that there has not been a novel of particular note to emerge in the 1990s follows her assessment of the Booker Prize winners from 1992 until 2000. Latynina's attempt to identify the greatest works of every decade swiftly falls apart when she reaches the end of the Soviet era and she is forced to abandon her task because she is unable to decide whether to attribute texts to the decade in which they were written or in which they were published (2001). Yet, what is key in Latynina's article is the question '*nado chitat?*' ('is it a "must-read"?') and it is this quality that many critics appear to be striving to find when they evaluate the books that are published and awarded prizes in the post-Soviet era. In contrast to Latynina's somewhat negative stance that the winners of prizes are decided somewhat arbitrarily as she believes she has illustrated with her little 'game' (2001), Vasilina Orlova (2005a) offers an alternative opinion, arguing instead that it is not possible to identify the great writers of the 1990s and 2000s when the decades are still so close in time. Orlova suggests that identifying the 'Great Russian novel' of the first two decades of the post-Soviet era is an impossible task and only with an interval of thirty or forty years will it become clear which works have remained relevant to readers, and thus deserve this title. Arguably, Ivanova is mistaken in her

belief that texts by the winners of the literary prizes are what readers will choose in the future. In various histories of literary prizes there are disputes about the winners. In 1901, Tolstoy missed out on the Nobel Prize for Literature, losing to the French poet René F. A. Sully-Prudhomme (Larsen n.d.). In more recent Russian literary prize history, the 1993 Booker prize was awarded, somewhat surprisingly, to Vladimir Makanin for *Stol, pokryty suknom i s grafinom poseredine* (Baize-Covered Table with Decanter). There were those who felt that Makanin had not been rewarded for this single text, but was in fact receiving something akin to a 'lifetime achievement' award. Baklanov, then editor-in-chief of *Znamya*, was reported to have said in an interview with Viktoria Shokhina, 'I'm very happy for Makanin; by virtue of his whole body of work he deserved the Booker and any other prize [...] But I like his earlier works better. I'm sorry that Oleg Yermakov [the favourite for the 1993 prize] didn't win the prize, too. That would have been fair' (1994, p.22). It seems that Orlova may be correct in her assertion that only time will tell whether the recipients of the literary prizes in the 1990s and 2000s are considered worthy of such an accolade by readers in the future. It seems that popularity and greatness are in conflict, whereby Makanin was awarded for his 'greatness' in the field of literature over an extended period. In contrast, Yermakov, as a relatively 'new' writer, would have been awarded the prize for his popularity at that time. Although as it transpires Yermakov appears to have made a relatively successful literary career for himself since, with publications in a number of literary journals, subsequent nominations for prizes, and victory in some of these competitions.⁸⁹

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the discussion about literature has continued throughout the period 1996-2008 and there is little evidence to suggest that it will cease at any point in the immediate future. However, it is clear that the participants in these discussions are drawn from a much wider spectrum compared with the Soviet era. It appears that the democratisation of Russia has, to some extent, meant also the democratisation of literature: comments on literary value are no longer restricted to the thick journals and published by a limited number of critics claiming to have the only rights to such commentary. The appearance of the literary review in newspapers and 'glossy' magazines has widened the space in which literature is discussed, something which the internet has intensified, where blogs and forums

⁸⁹ See Brown *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature* (1993, pp.172-174) for details of some of Yermakov's earlier works.

allow 'ordinary' readers the opportunity to become critics. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the popularisation of literary criticism, there appears not to have been a work of Russian literature that stands out from the vast numbers of titles that have been published between 1996 and 2008. Arguably there has been no single text that has been awarded this label for the 1990s or for the 2000s precisely because everyone is now a critic. In the pre-revolutionary and Soviet eras it was commonplace for critics or the intelligentsia to define which texts were 'literature'. In the post-Soviet era, such an assertion is unlikely to pass unchallenged, particularly now that so many more people contribute to the critical assessment of texts. However, it seems inaccurate to suggest that there will not be another 'Great Russian novel', thus reinforcing Orlova's belief that it takes time for a work of genius to be properly recognised. The continued existence of the 'two camps' among writers and critics has no doubt influenced any declarations about great literature: what may please the 'nationalists', will not be considered worth reading by the 'democrats' and vice versa. As in the West, taste is becoming diversified.

THE 'CELEBRITY' WRITER

Raising a profile which garners interest from readers is imperative in the new era of Russian writing. It is not enough for a writer simply to produce texts; he or she must also cultivate an image that encourages readers to choose his or her text over that of a competitor. Although the writer was considered important in the Soviet period and he or she enjoyed a high public profile, the position that he or she held was thanks to the efforts of the Soviet leadership who promoted reading as a healthy pastime and the writer as someone who knew the answers to the challenges that the average Soviet person faced in his or her mission to fulfil his or her role in Soviet society.

BORIS AKUNIN: THE MAN OF MYSTERY

Boris Akunin has made a commercial success of the literary series. As discussed at length in 'Chapter One: The Publishing Industry', any writer or publisher who wishes to make money from their works in post-Soviet Russia must consider writing or publishing a series of books with well-established characters that feature throughout. Akunin's series, *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* is 'deemed to be the most successful turn of the century Russian literary project' (Khagi 2005) and his approach to producing the *Fandorin* series has been commercially astute at every stage from conception to publication. Although a respected writer producing 'serious literature', Akunin has followed his own 'double strategy' whereby he 'aim[s] to write and publish good quality prose and at the same time make money from it' (Menzel 2005, p.46). The results of his endeavours have been such that he has created 'what critics called the first mainstream entertainment literature in post-Soviet Russia' (Menzel 2005, p.46). In spite of the success that he has achieved, Akunin did not intend to write the series himself. Better known for his translations rather than for his own writing, Akunin proposed the idea for the *Fandorin* series to several of his writer friends and colleagues. They each declined to take advantage of his proposal, so Akunin, convinced that the series would answer the requirements of the post-Soviet reader, decided to write it himself (Rotkirch [n.d.]).

The recognition that an author in Russia must be commercially aware if he is to make a living has informed every aspect of Akunin's project and he has employed a variety of techniques that enable him to appeal to as many readers as possible. One of the fundamental aspects of the *Fandorin* series is the genre. Although the novels

can be found in the detective fiction section of the bookshop, each of the novels is written in a different style:

'*The Winter Queen* [...] is a romantic adventure [...] The second [*Turkish Gambit*] is a spy thriller set in the Russo-Turkish war of the 1870s [and *Leviathan*] is pure Agatha Christie, with all the murder suspects confined to the first-class dining room of a steamer bound for the East' (Rees 2004).

The reason for such variation in his novels is to ensure that the reader is engaged with the series, reading more than just one or two texts. Although Fandorin and other characters may appear in each of the novels, the adventures that they have, the crimes that they encounter and the methods that are employed in order to solve the mystery are dealt with in different ways. John Cawelti points out that the reason for the success of genre literature is due to the fact that it provides the reader with a recognisable plot and a familiar outcome, but the means used in reaching the familiar outcomes are what engages the reader in the first instance (1976, p.1).

The detective genre also enables Akunin to flatter his readers. The solution of the puzzle is Fandorin's end goal and Akunin presents the evidence so that the reader has the opportunity to solve the puzzle along with Fandorin. Of course, such a technique is not new – novels by Ellery Queen enabled the reader to 'obtain clues in the same way as the protagonist detective' allowing the book to 'become an intellectually challenging puzzle' (Wikipedia 2011). In addition, Akunin makes frequent references to other works of literature: the opening to his first novel *Azazel* (1998, *The Winter Queen*) begins with a description of Alexander Gardens in Moscow and draws distinct parallels with Bulgakov's novel *Master i Margerita* (1966, *The Master and Margerita*) (Khagi 2005). Even Fandorin is made up of a mixture of literary heroes – 'ten per cent of Andrei Bolkonsky, ten per cent of Prince Mishkin [*sic*], ten per cent of Lermontov's Pechorin' (Rees 2004). Indeed, it was Russia's literary critics who first commented on the 'stylish detective series' (Latynina 2005) and led the wider population to Akunin's novels. By making reference to high literature, Akunin flatters the readers who can identify the texts to which he is referring, making them feel that they are well read because they can see the literary games that he is playing – his allusions are many – from Dickens and Dostoevsky, to Conan Doyle and Christie. In spite of complaints by critics who suggest that Akunin's texts cannot be compared with classic Russian literature (Anninsky cited in Finn 2006), Akunin has successfully targeted and taken advantage of Russia's new

emerging class – the office intelligentsia.⁹⁰ These readers enjoy detective novels, but want something more than just a ‘good read’ – they want to be engaged on another level and the literary games that Akunin plays meet this requirement (Baraban 2004, p.396).

Akunin’s sensitivity to the market for which he is writing has enabled him to successfully identify the feeling of nostalgia that was abounding in post-Soviet Russia for the ‘country we have lost’ (Baraban 2004, p.398). Sofya Khagi suggests that this is one of the key reasons for Akunin’s success. He correctly recognised both the sense of nostalgia that emerged in post-Soviet Russia and the feeling that the Russian people had been robbed of their true destiny by the imposition of Socialism. Even the subtitles on the covers of the novels invoke the feeling that Russia at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a nation filled with promise: ‘in memory of the nineteenth century when literature was great, the belief in progress was boundless, and crimes were committed and solved with elegance and taste’ (Akunin 1998-). However, Elena Baraban convincingly argues that, although Akunin identified the sense of nostalgia in post-Soviet Russia for the Russia that ‘could have been’, his novels are in essence a criticism of this sentiment that arose in the 1990s. Although the *Fandorin* series is set one hundred years earlier, the clear parallels that Akunin draws between the 1890s and the 1990s, encourage readers to see that the era for which they apparently yearn was no better than the time in which they are currently living (Baraban 2004, p.401).

The final ingredient in Akunin’s commercial success was the mystery that surrounded his identity. Although it has been suggested that a comprehensive authorial biography is appreciated by the readers, the questions concerning the identity of the author of the *Fandorin* series encouraged greater engagement and interest in the novels. Akunin, in an interview with Rees (2004), asserts that he did not reveal his identity when the novels were first published because of the shame associated with being a writer of popular fiction. Furthermore, he appears to have enjoyed the anonymity, putting the names of friends into his novels to entertain his wife and even giving a Georgian princess his own surname, Chkhartishvili, in *Osobyie porucheniya* (1999, *Special Assignments*). The interest that the media had

⁹⁰ The ‘office intelligentsia’ are described as ‘solid, secure, productive people, for whom a trained mind, civilised tastes and erudition in classical works is as desirable as healthy food, decent clothing and classes at a fitness centre’ (Rodnyanskaya cited in Chuprinin 2004).

in finding the writer of such a successful series no doubt further encouraged book sales as people bought the novels in order to see whether the excitement surrounding them was warranted.

In spite of any misgivings that Akunin may have had about writing popular fiction, his success is evident when considering the number of titles that he has produced and the associated print runs. As previously mentioned, publishers in the 1990s were reluctant to publish works by unknown Russian authors and this reservation is reflected in Akunin's relatively low total print runs in 1998 and 1999, when just 30,000 and 40,000 copies of his texts were printed.⁹¹ (Of course, it should be noted that such a figure is on a par with the average number of copies printed per book in these two years. Therefore, it seems that Akunin's publisher must have been relatively certain of the success of these novels, even though Akunin was an unknown name.) However, these small annual print runs have not characterised Akunin's publishing history. By 2000, Akunin's total annual print run was more than half a million copies and by 2005, more than 2.8 million copies of his texts were published. A film version of *Turetskii Gambit* (1998, *Turkish Gambit*) was released in 2005 which no doubt would have encouraged sales of all the *Fandorin* novels.

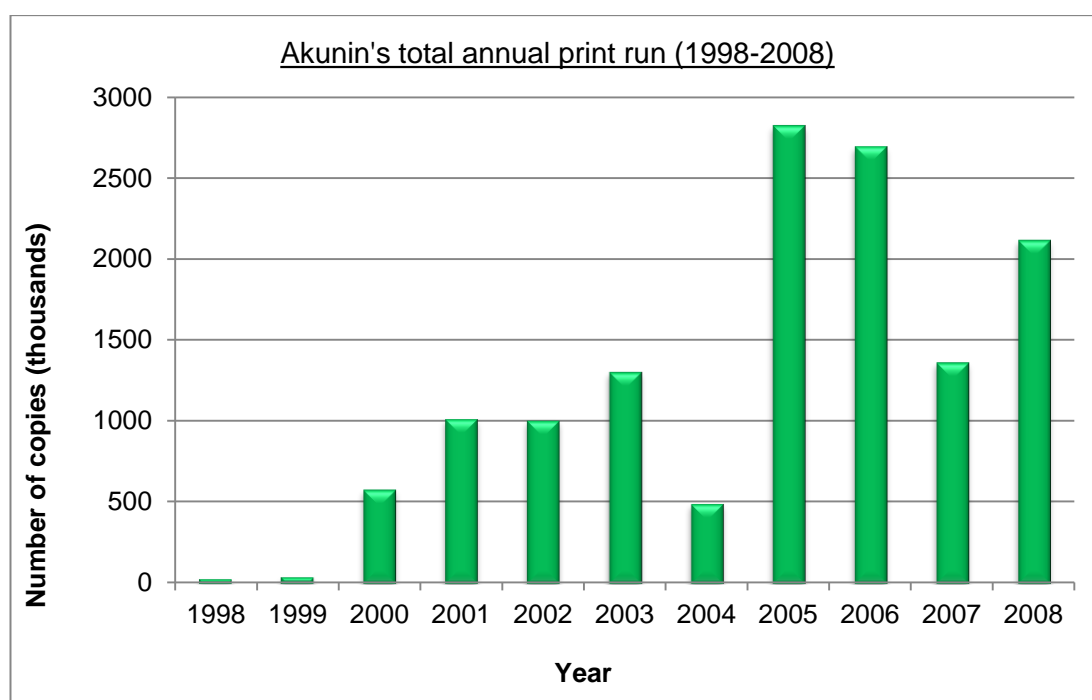


Figure 34: Akunin's total annual print run (1998-2008).⁹²

⁹¹ Akunin was not entirely unknown to the readers of the literary journals, but to the mass reader, his was a new name.

⁹² All figures compiled by the author.

Although Akunin's total annual print run has fluctuated in recent years, this is only a reflection of the pattern that the total print run for all texts has taken. As a further illustration of Akunin's success, the average print run for his texts far exceeds the average print run for all fiction texts. In 2002, Akunin's average print run was more than six times greater than the average fiction print run.

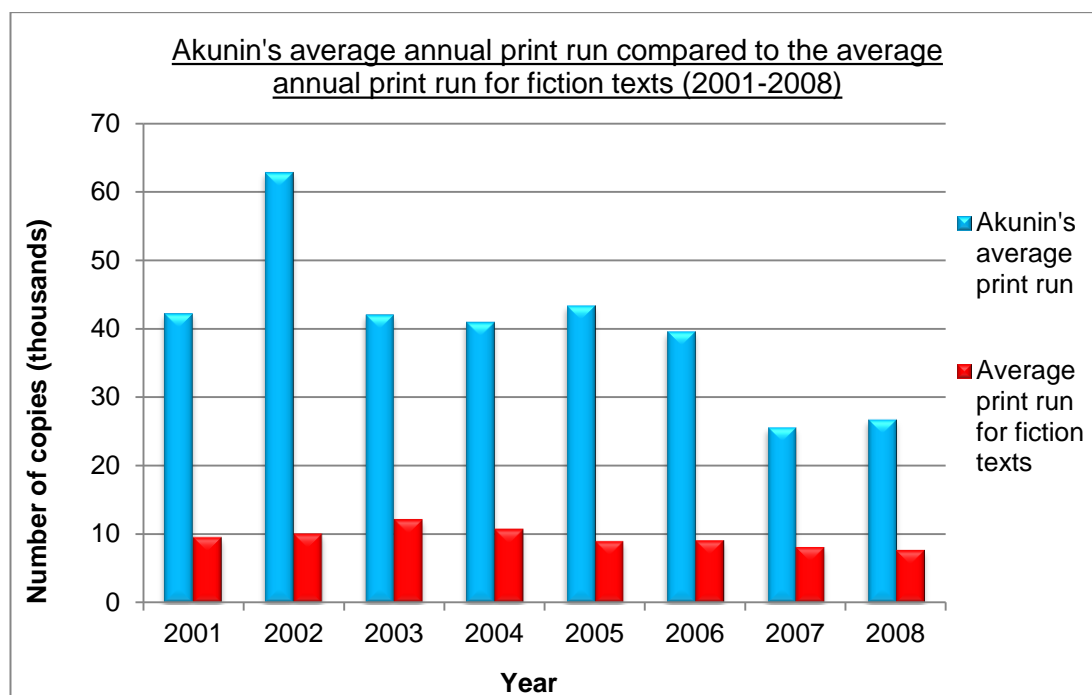


Figure 35: Akunin's average annual print run compared with the average annual print run for fiction texts (2001-2008).⁹³

Such a high average print run in 2002, was due in part to the publication of the latest *Fandorin* novels, but was augmented by the re-publication of several of Akunin's earlier works, including *Azazel* (1998) and *Turetskii Gambit* (1998), as well as those belonging to Akunin's other series *Pelagiya* (2001-2003) (featuring a crime-fighting nun). The re-release of these texts was no doubt timed to coincide with the publication of new works in order to ensure that any first-time readers of Akunin's novels were able to buy his earlier works.

The number of copies of Akunin's texts has ensured that he has been one of the most widely published authors of fiction throughout the 2000s. Figures compiled by the *ASKR* suggest that Akunin has been one of the top six most widely published writers in post-Soviet Russia since at least 2005. His chief rival occupying first place is Darya Dontsova, but Akunin features higher in the list than other popular writers,

⁹³ All figures compiled by the author.

including Marinina and higher than some authors of Russian classics, for example, Dostoevsky (Sirozhenko 2006 and 2007, Kirillova and Sukhorukov 2008).

There is no question that Akunin has managed to turn his writing talents into a huge post-Soviet success. His books have been acclaimed by readers and critics alike because of the way in which he combines good storytelling with allusions to the Russian literary history with which he is familiar. The secrecy surrounding his identity further contributed to his success and there has been recent speculation that Akunin is once again using a pseudonym to avoid detection. It has been suggested that he is writing as Anatoly Brusnikin, author of *Devyatnii spas* (*The Ninth Saviour* 2007) (Korsakov 2008). Denis Korsakov's article compares the photographs received from the publisher of Brusnikin with those of Akunin, arguing that Brusnikin is simply a digitally altered version of Akunin, an idea compounded by the fact that Brusnikin refuses to meet his readers, supposedly on account of his shyness and commitments to the publishing house.

OKSANA ROBSKI: A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ANASTASIA VERBITSKAYA

There is little doubt that part of Akunin's commercial success has arisen from the mystery surrounding his identity when his texts were first published. In complete contrast, the total lack of secrecy surrounding Robski and her life has undoubtedly contributed to the success of her works. Robski may have written a number of books about life in Moscow's upmarket Rublyevka district, but she has not achieved celebrity status solely through her publications: her forays into the world of celebrity endorsement and her socialite lifestyle; her appearances on the gossip pages of magazines and newspapers; high profile marriages to wealthy men; and her business ventures with Russian 'It' girl, Ksenia Sobchak, are just some of the other things for which she is famous. Although such exploits may be frowned upon by Russia's 'serious' writers, it could be argued that Robski is simply adopting a variation on Chuprinin's belief that writers must take a range of approaches in order to ensure that readers do not forget them. Of course, Chuprinin suggests the more conventional route of making the long- and short-lists of the various literary prizes, but there is no doubt that the coverage Robski receives on the pages of the 'glossy' magazines contributes to keeping her name on the lips of those who are likely to be interested in her books. Robski is not embarrassed to use such means to promote her texts and it seems that her literary success does not necessarily take pride of place among her accomplishments, she simply sees her writing as part of her 'brand' and combines it with other commercial ventures. Her 2007 book, *Zamuzh za*

millionera (*To Marry a Millionaire*), appeared in conjunction with a perfume by the same name and comprised part of a project that Robski worked on with Ksenia Sobchak, which was devised with the dual aim of making money and telling Russian women how to snare an oligarch. Of course, this is not dissimilar from approaches taken by celebrities in the West, where models, pop-stars and actresses launch perfumes, make-up and clothing ranges as well as books to increase their media profiles.

At first glance, it seems that Robski has ignored many of the accepted 'rules' for getting published in post-Soviet Russia: she has not produced a series, or picked a topic which has much relevance to the 'average' reader – the general perception of the New Russians in the 1990s was almost universally negative. Yet, on closer investigation, Robski appears to have been as shrewd as Akunin in identifying a theme on which to build her literary success. Robski correctly recognised the ideological shift that occurred during the Putin era – the emergence of the 'ideology of glamour'. Rudova (2008) credits the policies that Putin introduced in order to pull Russia out of the 'political turbulence and economic woes experienced under Yeltsin in the 1990s' with producing a consumer culture and she suggests that 'the ideology of glamour became the most ostentatious and alluring novelties of Putin's Russia'. In comparison with the 'dark days' of the 1990s, the 2000s have witnessed a shift in the material that appears in magazines and books, as well as on television and the radio.⁹⁴ It is on this emerging ideology that Robski has built her success. However, the question remains – was Robski herself partly responsible for the emergence of this ideology into mainstream culture, or did she simply take advantage of the shifting attitude of a population enjoying relative prosperity for the first time? Miriam Elder (2008) argues that the trend for books that offered readers an insight into the

⁹⁴ See Menzel, 'Russian Discourse on Glamour' (2008), in which she identifies seven main features of the new ideology of glamour which are perpetuated through 'glossy' magazines, TV talk shows and popular literature and can be seen throughout Robski's texts. The commercialised promotion of images connected with what are considered to be basic values – happiness, beauty, youth, health and love; the utmost refinement of packaging and presentation combined with the maximum simplification of content; a paradoxical mixture of exclusiveness and accessibility; a mixture of the patriotic cult of Russia's past, the glorification of the current post-imperial renaissance; the glamour images attempt to display the ideal of 'wholeness, harmony and radiance' (James Joyce), but are too vague and rarely understood as a trinity to be aimed at; the demonstration of materialism and outer appearance as a value; the promotion of aggressiveness as a value for both sexes.

world of Russia's *nouveaux riches* began in 2002 with the publication of Svetlana Kronna's *Nastolnaya kniga stervy* (2002, *The bitch's coffee table book*). However, Kronna's text enjoyed a print run of just 10,000 copies (with a further 15,000 copies printed in 2004), suggesting that perhaps the average Russian reader was not quite at a stage where the lives of Moscow's elite were of significant interest. In contrast, 2005, when Robski published *Ca\$ual* (2005), has been heralded as 'the Year of Robski', when 'we read Robski; talked about Robski, watched Robski on television [...] we slavishly followed every step that Robski took' (Gavrilov and Milchin 2005). Her subsequent contributions to the literary field have been credited with developing the interest of the 'ordinary' reader in the Moscow elite into something of an obsession and spawning a wave of imitation texts which are grouped under the collective title of *rublevskaya literatura* (Arkhangelsky 2007).

The description of Robski's texts as *rublevskaya literatura* or as *glamurnoe chtenie* reflects a development in Russian romantic fiction, where the heroine enjoys her happy life and shows the reader what her (or his) increasing prosperity could bring (although to a more limited degree than the women in Robski's texts).⁹⁵ If one of the chief aims of Russian romantic fiction in the 1990s was to show women how to survive the Yeltsin era, then *glamurnoe chtenie* reflects a shift in the 'self-help' aspect of popular literature directed at women. There is an emphasis on fashionable labels, trendy establishments and appropriate behaviour. Dubin (personal interview 2007) has suggested that works are defined as *glamurnoe chtenie* if they have been recommended by reviewers in 'glossy' magazines and that these texts are not solely concerned with reaching a mass audience, but also with being fashionable, which corresponds with Rudova's point that 'the word *glamur* itself has come to describe the emerging culture of Western-style 'glossy' journals, celebrity media, high fashion, the beauty industry, consumption of luxury goods and the hedonistic lifestyles of Russia's *nouveaux riches*' (2008). She also argues that *glamur* 'is very

⁹⁵ See Cherniak, 'Russian Romantic Fiction' (2005, p.161) for details of the distinction between the Russian and Western variations of romantic fiction. The difference between Russian romantic fiction and Western romantic fiction emphasises the priorities that Russian women have in the present climate. Unlike Western romantic fiction, where the obligatory happy ending often sees the couple disappearing into the sunset for a blissful future together, Russian romantic fiction can quite easily reach its conclusion with the heroine remaining cheerfully single: the point in Russian romantic fiction is not necessarily to have found a man, but to have found an acceptable level of independence and moved on from your original starting point.

much about the new consumer culture and thus, in essence, democratic and open to everyone' (2008). Robski's texts are clearly representative of *glamurnoe chtenie* and conform to the demands of the readers of the genre. *Glamurnoe chtenie* works should not weigh the reader down; they should not be too heavy, too long, or too deep, something which Robski appears to achieve with relative success, at least on the surface.

Furthermore, Robski's successful identification of the Russian public's growing obsession with the lives of the *novye russkiye* has in fact enabled her to capitalise on two other key factors that publishers and critics alike define as imperative for commercial success: serialisation and personal biography. Although her attempts at serialisation appear limited, with *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) apparently the only two of her texts that are linked, in reality, her entire catalogue is a series of sorts.⁹⁶ Each of her publications is based on the lives of New Russians – even her non-fiction works are part of this series that Robski has created: *Glamurnyi dom* (2006) and *Rublevskaya kuhnya* (2007) describe the interior design of the houses in the Rublyevka district and the foods that appear on the tables inside these houses. Her appearance in the 'glossy' magazines and on television talk shows have also provided Robski not just with a means of reinforcing her position at the front of her readers' minds, but with a legitimate biography – she belongs with those who live behind the tightly-guarded fences in the Rublyevka district. In spite of the apparent lack of serialisation and the absence of serious literary credentials, she has the ability to write on a topic of relevance to a large number of readers and it seems that Robski has established herself sufficiently as an author to ensure that publishers are prepared to print her texts in large print runs.

Despite her position as a relatively unknown writer, publishers and readers have been prepared to buy her texts. Only in 2006 was Robski's average print run lower than Akunin's. In 2005, 2007 and 2008, her average print run was considerably higher. The large number of copies printed for each of Robski's titles suggests that her publishers, *Rosmen*, believed that the texts that she produced would be bought by readers and, as a result, they were prepared to print her books even though she

⁹⁶ The extent to which *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual* (2007) are a series is debatable. Although written in a similar style and exploring the exploits of an unnamed heroine, there is little in the way of traditional serialisation – the characters and experiences appear to be different between *Ca\$ual* (2005) to *Ca\$ual 2* (2007).

was yet to establish herself as a bestselling writer. However, in contrast to Akunin, Robski has not enjoyed numerous reprints of her books whenever she has a new publication released: any reprints have been relatively small in number, possibly because the market was saturated by the first print run.

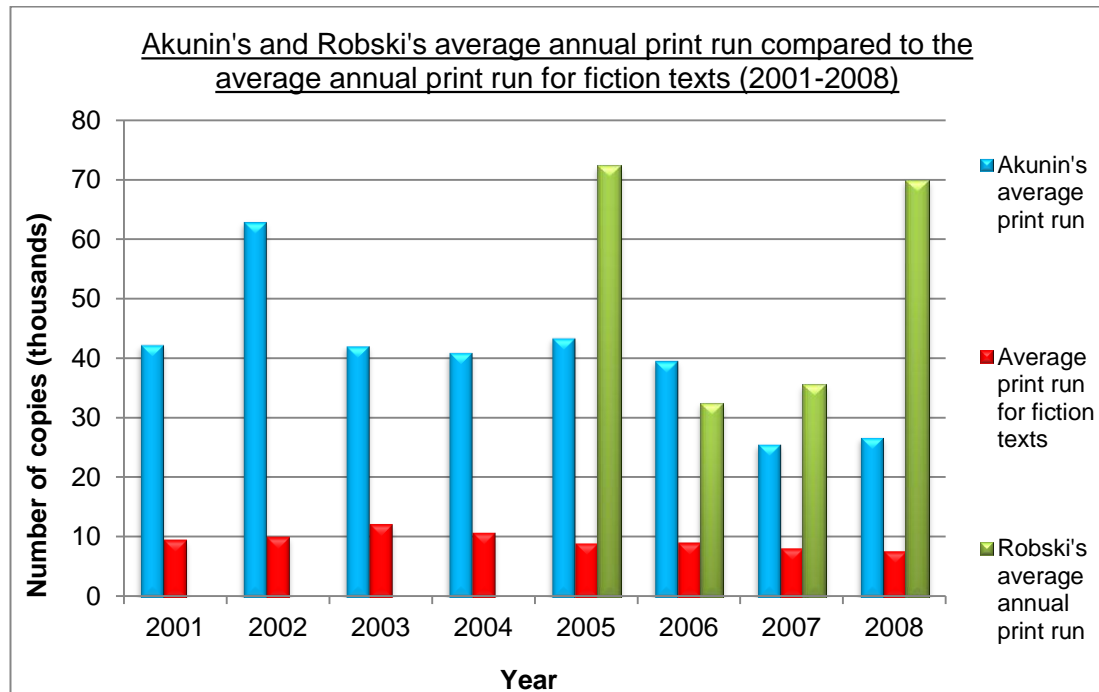


Figure 36: Akunin's and Robski's average annual print runs compared to the average annual print run for fiction text (2001-2008).⁹⁷

However, on closer viewing, the figures are not necessarily what they appear. In 2005, Akunin had sixty-five titles published with a total print run of 2.8 million copies. In contrast, Robski published just three titles with a combined print run of 290,000 copies. Such comparisons can be made for the subsequent three years, when Akunin published sixty-eight titles, fifty-eight titles and seventy-nine titles in 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. Robski saw just two titles published in 2006, four in 2007 and none in 2008, meaning that her total annual print run fell far short of Akunin's, even though the number of copies printed per title was relatively high.

⁹⁷ All figures compiled by the author.

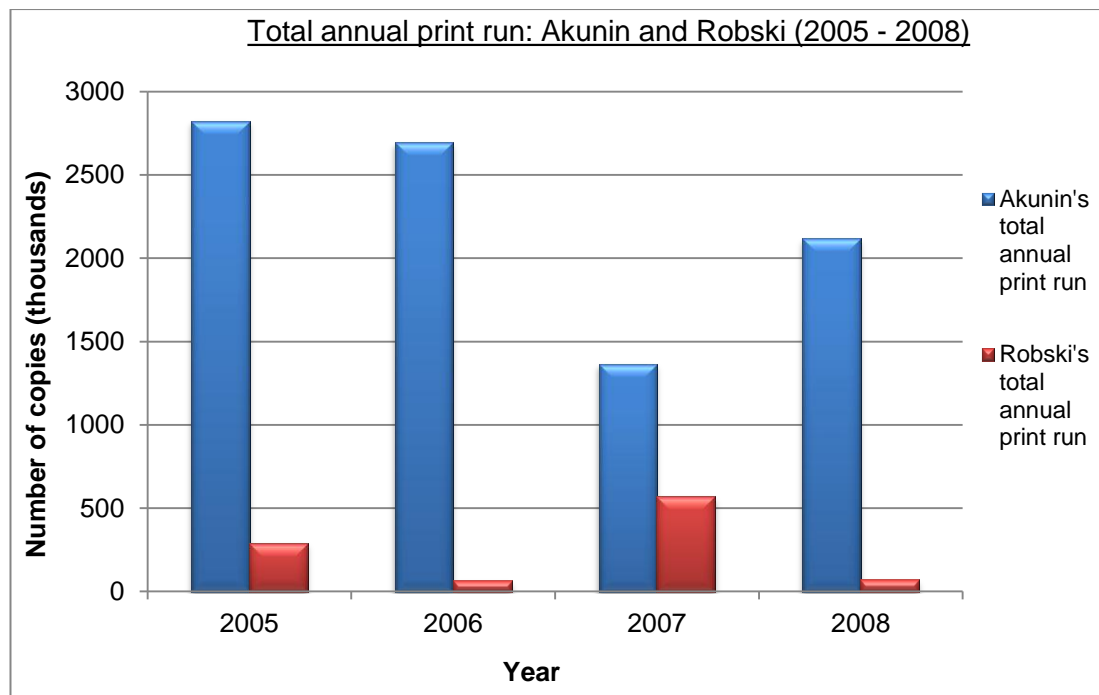


Figure 37: A comparison of Robski's and Akunin's total annual print run (2005-2008).⁹⁸

Conclusions

In spite of their different literary backgrounds, Akunin and Robski share fundamental characteristics: they are both commercially aware and have seen the opportunity that writing popular literature can provide when it comes to generating an income. However, the differences between them are notable. Akunin's decision to conceal his identity was no doubt a reaction to the attitude that a large number of writers, critics and academics felt and, as some may say, continue to feel, with regard to popular literature. In contrast, Robski has positively revelled in the fame that she has achieved through her writing. She freely admits that the 'product placement' in her novels brings her additional income and is not something she believes should cause her any anguish (Lobanova 2009). Furthermore, for 2000 roubles a ticket, Robski is prepared to share her experiences. She runs master classes on how to become a bestselling novelist by discussing her own books and experiences of writing (Lobanova 2009), something which no doubt troubles the literary elite even further than when writers of 'serious' literature choose to dabble with popular genres.

⁹⁸ All figures compiled by the author.

THE WRITER IS NOT A GOD AND LITERATURE DOES NOT HOLD *ALL* OF THE ANSWERS

As Carol Adlam suggests, the emergence of 'alternative' literature challenged the notion that literature should offer spiritual comfort to the reader (2005). Since the disintegration of state control over the content of literary works, many writers have been keen to move away from the lofty sentiment that literature should provide some form of guidance to the reader. In spite of determined assertions by some writers, Akunin included, that they are not trying to answer the *proklyatye voprosy* (accursed questions) and that their chief aim is to provide an entertaining read, there is still a nascent desire on the part of many readers for literature, even of the popular variety, to offer something more than a few hours of escapism.

BORIS AKUNIN: THE ORDINARY MAN

Akunin believes that writers in Russia continue to suffer from over-inflated importance. In an interview with Peter Finn (2006), he states that his function is to 'change the position of the author in Russian literature' and challenge the notion that a writer should be anything more than a writer. Akunin has expressed his concerns about the high profile of the writer in numerous personal interviews since achieving success with his *Fandorin* series, arguing that 'when the writer is an important figure in the country, it means that things are not going well' (Khagi 2005). Akunin does not restrict these observations to personal interviews; he expresses similar opinions in his texts. In *Turetskii gambit* (1998), in response to her question about whether he has read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Anwar tells Varya that 'literature is a toy; in a normal country it cannot have any great importance,' as if warning her against putting too much faith in writers of fiction (Akunin 2005, p.258). In spite of his assertions during an interview with Jasper Rees (2004) that he wishes to be an entertainer, rather than a 'teacher of life', Akunin acknowledges that readers still want him to follow the 'Russian tradition' and answer the big questions: 'what is the meaning of life?' 'Does God exist?'. The decision to conceal his identity further reinforces the notion that writers are expected to consider serious ideas in their works – as a respected writer and editor there is little doubt that, had he been writing as Grigory Chkhartishvili, critics and academics would have expected his texts to deal with the profound questions of life and death. By writing as Akunin, he could escape such preconceived ideas. However, as Leon Aron emphasises, Akunin's readers have found his texts 'a usable guide to forging their way through the onrush of modernity and freedom of choice, to charting their lives amid the ruins

of erstwhile moral, economic and political certainties' (2004, p.9). In an interview with Finn (2006), Akunin acknowledges the striking parallels that he draws between the 1890s and the 1990s, explaining that 'society was making choices which are pretty much similar to the ones we're having to choose from now'. He believes that Aleksandr II can be compared to Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, while the era of Aleksandr III draws parallels with that of Vladimir Putin, whom Akunin describes as 'reactionary, authoritarian, anti-liberal'.⁹⁹ Akunin's hero recognises the changes and challenges that 1890s Russia is enduring and his actions form the basis of Akunin's instructions to his readers. Throughout the series, Fandorin places significant emphasis on the importance of defining rules – not those imposed by law, but those created personally – and he strongly believes that Russia can only change when the individual citizens of Russia take responsibility for their own actions. In *Koronatsiya* (2000, *The Coronation*), Fandorin explains to Afanasii Stepanovich the rules by which he lives:

'you believe that the world rests on some rules, that it contains meaning and order. And I have long understood: life is nothing more than chaos. It has no order at all, and no rules. Yes, I do have rules. But they are my own rules, invented by myself for myself and not for the world. So let the world suit itself, and I will suit myself. Insofar as that is possible. One's own rules, Afanasii Stepanovich, are not the expression of a desire to arrange the whole of creation, but an attempt to organise, to at least some degree, the space that lies in immediate proximity to oneself' (Akunin 2009, p.229).

Akunin believes that the Russian people are already 'starting to think big of themselves' and that 'an overwhelming majority believe that the betterment of their life depends on them, not the boss and not the authorities of all levels' (Aron 2004). It appears that Akunin is capitalising on the sense of dignity and responsibility that he hopes is beginning to emerge in post-Soviet Russia and the *Fandorin* series provides the vehicle through which he intends to convey his message.

In spite of his assertions that he is simply attempting to write an engaging story, by measuring *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* against Dubin's evaluation of the

⁹⁹ See Aron, 'A Champion for the Bourgeoisie: Reinventing Virtue and Citizenship in Boris Akunin's Novels' (2004) for further details of the parallels between the Tsars Aleksandr II and Aleksandr III in the nineteenth century and Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

boeviki it is possible to see how Akunin is encouraging his readers to modify their behaviour with a view to altering Russia's destiny. Dubin argues that the *boeviki* 'assert, and put to the test, the male identity of the hero in a situation where social order is ill-defined – where the values and norms of Russian society are eroding and falling apart' (2005 p.103). Such a description can equally be applied to Akunin's *Fandorin* series, where the hero finds himself working in a nation where the leadership's actions have a negative impact on the lives of those living in Russia. Dubin recognises three characteristics belonging to the hero in the *boeviki* that can be viewed as traits of national identity. First, he argues that the hero of the *boeviki* is a loner. Secondly, that the hero is the personification of duty. And finally, that the *boeviki* contain a philosophy that is peculiar to both the detective genre and more precisely, to Russia.

In exploring the notion that the hero of the *boeviki* is a loner, Dubin (2005) suggests that the hero's name, or more precisely the 'testosterone-fuelled nickname' such as Beshenyi (which might be translated as 'Rabid', or 'Mad Dog') figures in the work's title and may feature throughout a series of novels with the same central character. The notion of a 'testosterone-fuelled' protagonist suggests a swaggering hero who is far from being weak and is intent on making his mark. Arguably, such a stance in the early 1990s could be viewed as a desire on the part of the (mostly male) readership to see Russia reinforce its position as a 'big player' on the world stage and defy the Western idea that the country had been weakened as a result of the USSR's disintegration.¹⁰⁰ Akunin encourages a less confrontational attitude to others by altering the way in which his hero, and the series as a whole, is perceived. In contrast to the assertion of masculine imagery in the *boeviki*, the epithets granted to Fandorin scarcely inspire fear or respect – 'Funduk', his nickname at school, or 'Erasmus', the nickname bestowed upon him by Count Zurov. Akunin's decision to avoid giving his hero a macho nickname demonstrates his desire to encourage readers to recognise that aggression is no longer the fundamental characteristic required to survive in contemporary Russia and that the nation in which they now live has evolved from the country as it was in the early 1990s.

¹⁰⁰ See BBC, 'Putin address to nation: Excerpts' (2005) for Putin's comments that 'the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. And for the Russian people, it became a real drama'.

In fostering a less hostile way of thinking, Akunin further challenges the idea that the hero of the *boeviki* should operate alone. Dubin suggests that the hero of the *boeviki* is not part of 'a bunch of seven associates as in a Western, not a crack team, not a family, not a clan' (2005, p.103) and the decision by the protagonist of the *boeviki* to work alone appears representative of the way in which many Russians felt with regard to the West during the 1990s. Various global and regional organisations encroached upon Russian territory – NATO expanded as far as Russia's doorstep – and in some instances former Soviet states joined the 'opposition's' institutions – EU countries now include Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (Howard White 2008). In addition, tensions with the CIS left Russia feeling even more isolated and conscious that if the country were to achieve anything, then it would be forced to do so on its own (White 2008). Akunin's novels offer a contrast to the notion that Russia should not work in collaboration with other nations. Although Fandorin is clearly comfortable working independently and does not appear to need assistance from any external source, he is happy to accept advice and support from various trusted individuals (Grushin in *Azazel* (1998) and Tulipov in *Osobiye poruchenie* (1999, *Special Assignments*)). Having witnessed the growth of self-reliance among many Russians, Akunin is keen for his readers to build relationships with others that are founded on mutual respect. However, Fandorin's friendship with the Japanese character, Masa, seems to be encouraging Russia to consider other partners, not those, such as the West, who may have been traditional allies in the past, but have also been the main cause of tension.

Arguably, the most significant aspect of the protagonist's isolation is that he is 'usually an orphan and has no children of his own' (Dubin 2005 p.103). It has been suggested that this was how many Russians felt in the immediate post-Soviet era. The events of 1991 caused a complete rupture with the past and saw a rejection of the previous seventy years – people felt that they had no sense of history and they could not pass on their heritage because they were no longer sure what this heritage was. There are striking parallels between Fandorin and the Russian population – he is an orphan who has to find his own sense of identity and contend with the large debt left to him by his father. Hard work and dedication ensure that Fandorin is not confined to a life of poverty and these experiences reflect those that Akunin has witnessed in the Russian population. He observes that 'in the past ten or fifteen years, people living in [Russia] have straightened their backs' and he believes that dignity is the 'most precious product of this evolution' (cited in Aron 2004). The difficulties of the 1990s have taught Russians to rely only on themselves

and not on any other source (cited in Aron 2004). Aron believes that 'Fandorins are everywhere in Russia [...] among many 25 to 45-year-olds, [the] country [is full of] perfectionist workaholics and seekers after quality in work and life' (2004).

By providing readers with a sense that there may be a positive future for them in Russia, Akunin attempts to counteract the growing nostalgia that is felt for the past. The sense of dignity that Akunin believes has emerged in the Russian population since 1991 is further developed through the dedication that Fandorin shows to his profession. Dubin suggests that in spite of the variety of 'ethical and behavioural models' that make up the hero's profile in the *boeviki*, he is the 'personification of duty' (2005, p.106) and that while he may be 'an adventurer, a risk taker, fortune seeker, [and] even a rogue, [he is one] of a special kind: he does not have any self-interest and seeks no personal advantage, either in monetary or status terms' (2005, p.106). Fandorin fits with everything that Dubin says about how the hero should be, apart from one significant attribute; he is certainly not a rogue, not even a loveable one. There is no sense that Fandorin would take from the rich and give to the poor – he might turn a blind eye if the proceeds from criminal activity ended up in the hands of the needy – viewing it as some sort of moral retribution – but he would not advocate or condone such 'Robin Hood' action.

Although Akunin asserts that he does not wish to provide the answers to the big questions, the topics that he covers in the *Fandorin* series are not trivial or insignificant. He claims to have recognised that Russian people are starting to rely on themselves and it seems that Akunin wishes to replicate this attitude in Fandorin and to provide encouragement to the people who read his books that their self-reliance is justified. Although Fandorin's existential ideas may appear somewhat progressive for the period in which the series is set, such concepts are not so radical in the twenty-first century. Anthony Olcott (2001, p.8) points out that there has been a rejection of various Western institutions on Russian soil and it appears that Akunin is pushing his readers to continue following their own path and to find solutions that are right for them.

OKSANA ROBSKI: THE EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN

In contrast to Akunin, who asserts that he wants in no way to furnish his readers with answers to complex questions, Robski quite freely admits that she believes that she can offer her readers the solutions to some of the problems puzzling them, particularly when their questions involve men, money, or designer fashions. She

believes that her experiences of life in Rublyevka more than adequately qualify her to address the questions on the lips of every young up-and-coming Russian (woman) – how to make the best of their relatively new prosperity in order to obtain a luxury lifestyle. Indeed, in their co-authored tome, Robski and Sobchak detail various strategies on ensnaring a millionaire: ‘elite clubs and restaurants are useless [...] the men will already be attached. [...] Instead, go for business lunches at the top hotels where men are alone and definitely have money. And don’t wear leopard print’ (Malpas 2007).

At face value, the heroine of Robski’s *Ca\$ual* (2005) is concerned with maintaining appearances, keeping pace with the others who form her social circle and ensuring that those who are not part of her class are aware of their inferiority. Much of the novel is concerned with those characteristics of *glamour* that Menzel has identified. The aggressiveness that Menzel mentions as being obligatory for both sexes helps to reinforce the heroine’s sense of superiority over others. She rages at the policemen who pull her over on the highway when she overtakes the line of traffic that has come to a standstill waiting for Putin’s motorcade to pass (Robski 2006, p.58) and the heroine of *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) is unreasonable in her argument with the photographer (2007, p.123). Robski’s heroine and her friends further reassert their alleged superiority as they pose repeatedly for photographs that appear in the Russian glossies (2006, p.2) profiling new restaurants, or the launch of some new product. For the protagonists of the novel, the ‘utmost refinement of packaging and presentation’ (Menzel 2008) extends to themselves and even their pets. Kira meets her friends with a poodle named Blondie whose fur she has dyed pink using *Wella* hair dye so that the dog will match her outfit (Robski 2006, p.200). The heroine has botox, a relatively minor procedure in comparison with her Rublyevka neighbours, who between them have endured ‘four nose jobs, six liposuctions, two eyelid tucks, and five lip jobs’ (Robski 2006, p.117). In *Ca\$ual 2* (2007), Robski’s heroine proclaims that ‘fashion is a lifestyle’ (2007, p.26) and there are clearly a large number of expensive ways to maintain this lifestyle. What is interesting to note is that in *Ca\$ual 2* (2007), although the heroine continues to be concerned with outward appearances, there is less emphasis on fashion labels and greater comment on the ‘finer things in life’, for example, fine wines, the names of which are referenced throughout the text. In some ways it seems that Robski’s heroine has become more sophisticated in *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) and it is clear that the experiences that Robski has enjoyed because of the success of her first novel have found their way on to the pages of her second book. Her descriptions of photo shoots and

interviews have undoubtedly been adapted and her decision to take on an agent, who becomes a character in her own right, is documented on the pages of *Ca\$ual 2* (2007).

Yet for Robski's heroines and her friends, the prime source of funding to maintain their lifestyles and appearances is from men. The stories of her girlfriends illustrate the lengths to which they will go to ensure that they continue to enjoy the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. One of the heroine's friends, Katya, discovers that her husband is planning to leave her, so she spreads the word that she is pregnant with his child. Although this does not prevent him from abandoning her, it provides Katya with the opportunity to 'lose' the baby and make certain that the guilt her tycoon feels can be eased only with an income of \$10,000 per month. Even Svetlana, the woman with whom Sergei, the heroine's husband, was having an affair, appears to have been trying to find a guarantee for her future. Had Sergei lived, then at the very least he would have supported her and the baby, but in the event of his death, Svetlana is not prepared to give up the future that she envisaged for herself and she has no qualms about approaching for money the woman whose husband she was hoping to steal instead. Robski's heroine recognises that the younger woman is taking advantage: 'I did not smile. ATMs do not smile' (Robski 2006, p.134). However, it gives her the chance to see how she treated Sergei when he was alive. In spite of this, she continues to expect men with money to provide the answers to her 'big questions'. The heroine calls on a number of men to help her: she asks Oleg to find and kill her husband's murderer, she relies on Vanechka, an old flame, to take her out for dinner and flirt with her and she persuades her husband's former colleague, Vadim, to sell her buttermilk in his shops. Robski's heroine never feels indebted to the men she asks for assistance; they simply provide a means for her to overcome an obstacle and she has no problem taking advantage of people and situations in order to maintain her extravagant lifestyle. However, she expresses her surprise when they treat her like an equal, not simply as the wife of one of their acquaintances. At the six-month anniversary wake that Robski's heroine holds for Sergei she observes this change in attitude: 'The husbands of my girlfriends were talking to me as an equal. It was an incredible sensation' (Robski 2006, p.108). It seems that Robski is attempting to challenge the perception that men have concerning the women who belong to the society of the *nouveaux riches*, yet in the next sentence, any new-found respect that the men have for women is forgotten as they appreciate Katya's new haircut (Robski 2006, p.108).

Clearly, Robski's texts can be read as a flippant reaction to the *chernukha* (sensationalist muckraking) of the 1990s. There is a strong sense that having endured the trials and instability of the Yeltsin era, enjoying the relative prosperity that has accompanied Putin into office is something of an entitlement in which everybody should participate. However, it is entirely possible to delve deeper than the superficial frivolity that punctuates Robski's texts. Although *Ca\$ual* (2005) appears to be anti-*chernukha*, Mesropova (2009) rightly points out that there are numerous episodes that are characteristic of 1990s *chernukha*. The dark side of the 1990s business world seems to remain even in 2000s Russia. *Ca\$ual* (2005) opens with the contract killing of the protagonist's husband because of a business deal that has gone wrong. Mesropova suggests that Sergei 'represents both the first generation of "New Russians" and the criminal, sociocultural, and economic chaos of the Yeltsin years' (2009, p.99) and that his death symbolises the end of the old way of doing things. However, the heroine's decision to take out a contract on the life of the man who supposedly killed Sergei surely demonstrates that life in Putin's Russia has not radically altered. The lack of concern that Oleg shows when he discovers that the heroine has asked for the wrong man to be murdered further illustrates this fact: '[...] since there was this mistake with you, if it'll make you feel better, I'll return your money' (Robski 2006, p.113). He cannot understand that she is disgusted by her actions. Furthermore, it transpires that the police and various other 'witnesses' are being paid by Sergei's former friends and colleagues to ensure that the heroine is kept safe and that the killer is eventually put behind bars. Clearly, those who have money continue to control life in Russia and behind the glamorous façade very little has changed since the chaos of the 1990s.

The relationships between men and women in *Ca\$ual* (2005) are another area in which Robski's characters struggle. The notion of fidelity is an alien concept to many of the women and men in *Ca\$ual* (2005) and *Ca\$ual 2* (2007). The majority of the heroine's friends seem to live in perpetual fear that their lovers and/or husbands will leave them and although several of them have been left by adulterous husbands, they have no concerns about poaching other women's husbands. Lena, one of the heroine's friends, is dedicated to finding a way to force her boyfriend to leave his wife and daughter so that he will move in with her, while the heroine herself declares that in one sense she is glad that Sergei was murdered so that she no longer had to feel jealous of the woman with whom he had an affair (Robski 2006, p.7). Furthermore, Veronika is raped and beaten by her husband because

she has questioned him on his whereabouts. According to the heroine, Igor knows that Veronika loves him, which is why when he hits her; he knows that she will not leave him. In *Ca\$ual 2* (2007) the heroine is divorced from her husband because he has had an affair and the television personality whom she meets also appears to be cheating on his partner with the heroine, which horrifies her when she finds out the truth.

The lesson to the reader in these episodes is at least two-fold. In presenting the darker side of life in Rublyevka, it seems that Robski is sounding a cautionary note to her readers: this is how people with money and material advantages behave – is this really a healthy aspiration? Rudova suggests that *glamur* is condemned by its critics because it is ‘destroying the humanistic spirit of the Russian cultural heritage [and it] turns people away from real life and makes them socially indifferent’ (2008), something which appears to be quite evident in Robski’s *Ca\$ual* (2005). Even when the heroine recognises that she enjoys a privileged position in life, she is not always driven to do anything about it. She recounts a tale of giving money to an elderly woman and the sadness that she feels, yet she makes no other mention of charitable acts. Those that she performs through her business enterprise are simply acts of bribery to ensure that her business can continue to inconvenience the people who live nearby (Robski 2006, p.176). The second function that the elements of *chernukha* serve is to emphasise to the reader the importance of making the most of everything in spite of the difficulties that life presents: by succumbing to the chaos that *chernukha* can cause, there is every danger of returning to the disorder of the Yeltsin era. Although her husband is murdered, the heroine carries on – she does not want to go back to life in a tiny apartment or start wearing a Mickey Mouse dressing gown as her friend has done; she strives to find a way to carry on living life in the style to which she has become accustomed. Although Robski promotes herself and her works as providing the answers to questions of achieving a celebrity-like fulfilment with the right trappings to accompany this lifestyle, there are elements of her texts that can be viewed as cautioning the reader against wishing for what looks like the perfect life from the outside. Of course, such an attitude could be viewed as somewhat hypocritical. There is no sense that Robski would ever be prepared to give up her glamorous lifestyle now that she has attained it and the way in which she describes the advantages that it brings can hardly be read as a serious warning to the reader. However, in achieving the security that wealth in post-Soviet Russia brings, Robski may now be in a position to assess her life and the actions of her friends in a more

critical way, thus prompting a more honest appraisal of her behaviour and the negative impact that it can have.

Conclusions

It is clear that both Akunin and Robski deal with more than frivolity and entertainment in their respective texts. In spite of his protestations about the role of the writer in post-Soviet Russia, Akunin believes that Russian people are beginning to change their behaviour and way of thinking and as a writer he is able to support and encourage such an idea. Robski, whose novels appear more superficial than Akunin's at first glance, addresses some complex issues, including rape and murder, which may not be the first subjects readers would expect to find on the pages of *glamurnoe chtenie*. Of course, there may be those who believe that writing about such topics in a book that is primarily concerned with money, sex and shopping trivialises them. However, the inclusion of these darker episodes encourages readers to recognise that even those who appear to be protected by wealth and status are not invulnerable.

ARE AKUNIN AND ROBSKI 'LITERATURE'?

In spite of the suggestion by numerous critics, both Russian and Western, that the appearance of popular literature on the Russian literary scene has meant the end of great Russian literature, the discussion concerning literature has not subsided, and in fact, the emergence and subsequent growth of popular genres has forced critics to acknowledge the role that such literature plays in post-Soviet Russia. The recognition of these sorts of texts has prompted critics to engage in debates relating to the position of this type of literature in the Russian literary canon and has forced them to consider their own responses to popular literature. However, the deliberations regarding this 'new' type of literature are complicated and have caused significant disagreements among those who consider themselves the 'old masters' (Chuprinin 2004a) of literary criticism. Chuprinin (2004a) notes that Latynina, Rodnyanskaya and Nemzer all have differing perceptions of popular literature and whether it can make any contribution to the Russian literary canon.

BORIS AKUNIN: AN APPEARANCE OF LITERARINESS

Akunin's series, *The Adventures of Erast Fandorin* (1998-), has prompted considerable discussion concerning the place of these texts in the Russian post-Soviet literary canon, primarily because critics are unable to agree where the texts belong – on the shelf of 'high' literature or on that of the popular. The reaction to Akunin's series is comparable to the reception that Dorothy L. Sayers's novels received among the 'educated reading public' as defined by Queenie Leavis. Leavis describes Sayers as a 'representative of the new kind of best-seller, the educated popular novelist' and she states that Sayers was 'undoubtedly conscious of what [she was] doing' (cited in Ashley 1997, p.56), with a view to producing a text that would appeal to the whole spectrum of the reading public. Such assertions certainly apply to Akunin: his credentials as a respected academic are coupled with his claim that he thought rationally about writing the sort of text that would sell well and that his wife would not be embarrassed to read on the Moscow metro (Rees 2004).

Similar criticisms to those that Leavis levels at Sayers for her novels *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) have also been directed at Akunin. Leavis accuses Sayers of forgetting her position as a popular writer on four counts. She complains that Sayers's novels

'have an appearance of literariness; they profess to treat profound emotions and to be concerned with values; they generally or

incidentally affect to deal in large issues and general problems; and they appear to give an inside view of some modes of life that share the appeal of the unknown for many readers' (cited in Ashley 1997, p.57).

Leavis goes on to argue that

'literature gets heavily drawn upon in Miss Sayers's writings, [...] she displays knowingness about literature [and includes] impressive literary excerpts' and Leavis concludes: 'Miss Sayers's fiction, when it isn't mere detective story of an unimpressive kind, is [...] stale, second-hand, hollow [...] because the breath of life was never in it' (cited in Ashley 1997, p.57).

In comparison with Sayers, Akunin freely admits that classic works of literature inform his writing. In an interview with Orion Publishing Group (2005), Akunin cites Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov - and Alexander Dumas, Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain as among the greatest influences on his series. Critics have noted that Akunin weaves

'cultural fragments from Russian fairy tales, Georgian folk songs and international cinema [into] his text[s]' and that his works are placed on bookshelves somewhere between Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas (Polshikova 2000).

Furthermore, Akunin borrows liberally from the classics and just as Sayers is accused of producing texts that are 'second-hand and hollow,' so too is Akunin. Baraban points out that 'critics rally to defend the Russian classics from which Akunin unabashedly "borrows" imagery, phrases, ideas, and characters, and to protect Russian history from being retold by such an "unscrupulous" individual as Akunin' (2004, p.399). Indeed, she points out that critics charge Akunin with 'emptiness, meaningless language games, and misuse of the cultural heritage' (Baraban 2004, p.399). Lev Anninsky replicates Leavis's accusation, declaring that

'Akunin gives a panorama of all Russian styles, and he does it very skilfully, like a true literary scholar [...] here is Leskov, and here is Tolstoy, and here is Turgenev. Akunin's prose is like a dead tree sprinkled with resin – it smells of wood but doesn't produce shoots' (cited in Finn 2006).

The objections voiced by Leavis that Sayers merely professes to deal with profound emotions and values are also applicable to Akunin. Leavis claims that

‘in the matter of ideas, subject, theme, problems raised, [Sayers] similarly performs the best-seller’s function of giving the impression of intellectual activity to readers who would very much dislike that kind of exercise if it were actually presented to them’ (cited in Ashley 1997, p.57).

By referencing respected works of literature, it appears that Akunin is indulging in the same crime as Sayers, providing his readers with the opportunity to learn about the Russian and European classics without them actually having to read the originals. ‘Some critics agree that deciphering Akunin’s allusions to literature, film, and historical events constitutes the primary source of pleasure in reading his mysteries’ (Baraban 2004, p.396). Much comment has been made about the ‘office intellectuals’ for whom Akunin caters and his discussion of the current challenges facing the population in the post-Soviet era gives the impression that he is concerned with presenting solutions to these problems. However, as Akunin himself suggests, there is no reason why popular literature should not be well written (Baraban 2004, p.396) and in his quest to dispel the notion that the writer should not be an entertainer, his attempts to direct the reader towards independence should not be confused with a desire to provide the answers to the big questions.

Leavis’s final criticism of Sayers is also one experienced by Akunin. In Sayers’s novel *Gaudy Night* (1935) the notion that she gives a ‘view of some modes of life that share the appeal of the unknown for many readers’ (Leavis cited in Ashley 1997, p.56) relates to her description of imagined life at the University of Oxford. Leavis argues that the representation is ‘vicious’, that it is ‘popular and romantic while pretending to realism’ and that Sayers does a disservice by giving substance to such a myth (cited in Ashley 1997, p.58). Once again, Akunin can be accused of a similar misdemeanour because of the apparently romantic view that he creates of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Moscow and the parallels that he draws between the 1890s and the 1990s can be seen as further confirming the realism of the text. Aron (2004) points out that the *Fandorin* series is ‘crafted carefully and tastefully after the classic 19th-century Russian prose’, contributing to the nostalgia with which the era is viewed. Baraban (2004) questions Akunin’s depiction of history and she draws attention to those who criticise Akunin of distorting Russia’s past. To assess Akunin’s texts in this way is unfair. After all, he makes no pretensions to great literature. It could be suggested that the critical assessments of his works are immaterial, not least because he is writing in a world where commercial success is

one of the chief indicators of achievement and there is little doubt that Akunin has accomplished this.

OKSANA ROBSKI: A SUCCESSFUL 'WOMAN WRITER'

Just like Akunin, whose primary concern when writing popular literature was the reception he would get from his 'high' literature-writing colleagues, Robski had also to contend with the challenge of being a female writer writing about women and their experiences. Adlam suggests that in the early part of the 1990s discussions about literature were preoccupied with its changing status and finding a new definition for what it had become (2005). In fact, Chuprinin's 1988 definition – 'alternative' literature – became the accepted terminology. In a sense, literature written by women and genre literature, particularly *glamurnoe chtenie*, which has more recently emerged, can be seen as part of this 'crisis' in Russian literature that was so often lamented in the early 1990s. Yet to suggest that the success of popular literature for women is part of a crisis is inaccurate.¹⁰¹ The success of women's writing in both popular and 'high' literature is a phenomenon to be celebrated, particularly as for the majority of the Soviet era there was a general absence of literature for women that was not about improving the USSR.

Evaluating Robski's contribution to the field of Russian literature solely in the context of being a female writer is to do her a disservice, yet it is an aspect of her writing that cannot be dismissed without greater discussion. As previously mentioned, the widespread publication of female writers is still relatively new. In 1987, Heldt asserted that 'nearly all Russian women writers den[ie]d the writer's vocation, even as they practice[d] it. They cite[d] the urging of friends or editors, not their own ambitions as the impetus for writing' (1987, p.2). In contrast, Robski has stated that she has always felt compelled to write (Lobanova 2009) and argues that she has always maintained a link with writing from the days when she studied journalism at university. Although the perception that women writers have of their own works may have altered since the late 1980s and early 1990s, this sense of inferiority about 'being a writer' was not the only misguided assessment of women's

¹⁰¹ *Zhenskaya proza* ('women's writing') continues to be used in a derogatory fashion. Anastasia Verbitskaya's texts were frequently dismissed as *zhenskaya proza* (Marsh 1996) and many texts written by women in the 1990s and 2000s have been lumped into the same category, which assumes that there is nothing of particular worth or relevance on the pages of such books.

writing against which women writers had to fight. To many outside Russia, the belief that 'Russian literature [was] a totally male tradition' (Heldt 1987, p.2) was fuelled by the idea that women's writing was 'simply not very interesting' (Kelly 1994, p.3) and that women's writing would never be of particular value because it dealt with 'women's limited experience, rather than with men's enormous experience of the social and political issues which have been central to the dominant discourse of Russian literature [...]' (Kelly 1994, p.3). This is not to suggest that Robski's text should be central to the debate about Russian literature, but to dismiss it out of turn because of her 'limited experience' would be unfair. The assumption that any text written by a woman is boring because it focuses on the areas with which she is familiar should be challenged. Although Robski's text may not be of interest to a large number of readers, she does contend with issues that are of wider relevance to society and offers a perspective and reasoning that may differ from those that a male writer could have produced. While it is not unreasonable to suppose that a male writer could have written the scenes in which the heroine explains that Veronika is a victim of domestic violence who continues to live with her abusive partner, the reader's understanding of why Veronika does so is surely influenced by the way in which the rest of the story has been told and by the fact that it has been written by a woman.

Further to her position as a 'woman writer' and the implications associated with this title, Robski has also written about women and their lives, which presents an additional set of preconceived notions that have been constructed as challenges for women writing literature to overcome. In spite of a relatively small number of female Russian writers, there is 'no lack of general pronouncements about how women act or feel or think in Russian literature: these, however, have been overwhelmingly made by men' (Heldt 1987, p.2). The women in works of Russian literature were under significant pressure, not least because of the 'insistence on female superiority [...] that set the standard for the Russian novelistic heroine' (Heldt 1987, p.4). It is the lack of adherence to this standard that has provoked such consternation among Robski's critics. Aside from all the complaints about her use of language, there is little doubt that the women in Robski's texts do not correspond to the traditional role of the woman in Russian literature. The behaviour of the heroine and her friends is not so very different from the described actions of the men in the novel: both the men and women cheat on their partners, think nothing of abusing authority if it helps them achieve their goals and conduct business in an underhand fashion. The

female characters in Robski's *Ca\$ual* (2005) are as flawed as the male, which could be viewed as a suggestion that there is no salvation for Russia through its women.

Arguably, Robski is something of a pioneer. Not only is she a commercially successful female writer, she gives New Russian women a voice. Her texts make an interesting contribution to the Russian literary scene, in particular to the study of contemporary women's writing. Furthermore, she demonstrates an awareness of what the reading public appears to want: *glamurnoe chtenie*. Not only did she recognise a growing trend in the first instance, she has no doubt helped to perpetuate it and by constantly reinventing her texts within the same genre she has continued to sell well.

Conclusions

Clearly Akunin and Robski have prompted a healthy level of debate about their respective contributions to the Russian literary scene. Although the critical reactions to their texts are not entirely positive, the fact that they are being discussed at all demonstrates that critics are beginning to take note of popular literature and the value that readers place on it, not necessarily because of its treatment of profound subjects, but because it offers them practical solutions to the challenges of everyday life.

CONCLUSIONS

There is little doubt that popular literature now rules the Russian literary scene and its domination is likely to continue for some considerable time. It is not surprising that the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed the popular literary genres to become established favourites with post-Soviet readers. The turbulent conditions of the early 1990s encouraged the reader to search out those texts that gave him or her clues as to how to cope with the changes that were taking place in Russia. Furthermore, the reader wanted to be reassured that he or she was not alone in the struggles of the new era, or that his or her reaction to events was not out of the ordinary. Vsevolod Brodsky argues that this was one of the fundamental reasons why the foreign translations that dominated the market in the immediate post-Soviet people were replaced by Russian variations of similar stories. These texts

‘express[ed] the unconscious ideas and inner fears and hopes of the average [person...] after all, Russians would rather read about murders committed and solved in familiar surroundings, in Moscow’s suburbs, rather than in faraway London or Los Angeles’ (2001).

What is interesting to note is the way in which the content of popular literature has changed and how the various genres have altered between 1996 and 2008. If it is accepted that the content of popular literature does reflect the concerns of the population, then the split of the detective genre into *boeviki* and *zhenskie detektivy* clearly demonstrates that reader demand has influenced the types of texts that publishers produce. The rise of *glamurnoe chetenie* further exemplifies the recognition by publishers of the female reader who is interested in something other than the violence and sex found in the *boeviki*. Lovell suggested that publishers were beginning to appreciate the value of female readers: ‘the post-Soviet book market rediscovered one important category that had been neglected even more than the others: women’ (2000, p.137) and his opinion is reinforced by the fact that more women than men claim to read on a regular basis (Menzel 2005, p.45). Of course, this is not to suggest that all women want to read is *glamurnoe chetenie*, but the emergence of such texts which are likely to be of greater interest to women demonstrates the way in which publishers and writers are more aware of their audience.

The rise of popular literature reflects the commercialisation of the book market. Clearly, publishers are seeking to make money from the texts that they publish, which means that they need to produce books that appeal to the largest number of

readers, not least because this number of readers appears to be declining, from twenty-three per cent who claimed never to read fiction in 2002 to forty-six per cent by 2008. However, one of the fundamental differences between publishing in the post-Soviet era and that of the Soviet period is the ability to reprint texts because they are in demand. In the post-Soviet era, publishers are not obliged to produce large numbers of a particular text simply because it is in the work plan; they are at liberty to test the market with a relatively small print run, which they can quite easily supplement if the text proves to be successful. Of course, the domination of popular literature has not been without its critics. Those who were previously engaged in the business of assessing texts on their respective merits and making pronouncements about which were worth reading have struggled with the rise of both popular literary genres and of those who comment upon them. The popular genres have allowed many more people the opportunity to become involved in the literary process, sharing their opinions and influencing the writer as a result.

For writers, the post-Soviet era has been as difficult as it was for the rest of the population. Many of them lost their privileged position in society, as readers who were struggling to make ends meet found that books and literature were something that they could do without, particularly if the sentiments contained in the pages were entirely remote from the challenges that Russia was facing. A large number of writers were unable to cope with the changes affecting literature and chose to leave the profession. For those who decided to continue writing, the literary scene is now such that a writer can be a bestseller one day and virtually forgotten the next. The challenge of continually producing a text that stands out from everything else on the market is unending and while those writers who are engaged in producing 'high' literature might be noted for their different types of text, the lack of mass appeal means that they are likely to be read only by a limited audience.

In spite of any reservations that critics, academics, writers and readers may have about the sorts of literature that are currently available on the Russian book market, there is no doubt that these texts will dominate the literary scene for some considerable time and the sooner those involved in the literary process recognise this, the easier the relationship will become.

CONCLUSION

There was little doubt that the collapse of the Soviet regime would have an impact on every aspect of life and that Russia after 1991 would be very different from the country it had been since 1917. What was not so clear was just *how* the demise of an authoritarian regime would affect those living in Russia, or that the legacy of such a system would be felt for years, if not decades, to come. It soon became clear that many of the assumptions made about how Russia would change after the end of the Soviet Union were misguided and this was no less true for the hypotheses that were made about literature and the ways in which it would develop in a country of free expression. In the Soviet era, literature's fundamental role was the political education of the population, which strove to instil in readers the ideals of Communism and encouraged their growth into model Soviet citizens. Of course, such an aim could be achieved only through the use of strict regulation and censorship. By definition, this approach automatically meant that literature's 'counter-function' was to challenge the state and its ideological stance. The appropriation of literature as a battleground for ideological dominance further elevated its status above that of an ordinary occupation for leisure time and placed it on a pedestal. Through the exploration of four key themes relating to literature – the commercial; political; educational; and the use of literature as a basis for debate – this thesis has sought to explore how the disintegration of the USSR affected the function of literature and how these changes manifested themselves in the period 1996-2008.

It seems that the only genuinely new function of literature not to be affected by the former Soviet era is that of money maker. The publishing industry in Russia has proved to be an area where profits can be large. Although there may have been some dependence on the state in the mid-1990s and the first part of the 2000s, the support that the state now offers is minimal and publishers seek to make profits based on the authors that they publish. However, the commercialisation of literature has not benefited all aspects of the Russian literary scene. In particular, the literary journals have struggled to survive in an era when publishing literature is closely associated with making profits. The ability of publishers to produce cheap books on demand has had a negative impact on the 'thick' journals. Owing to the changes in publishing practice which mean there is no longer a substantial lead-time before a book appears in print, writers do not need to be published in a literary journal. It is miraculous that the literary journals have continued to survive so long beyond the

end of the Soviet period, particularly given the explosion in the number of publishing houses and their spread throughout Russia. Perhaps what has protected the journals thus far is the distribution problems that publishers have faced and for readers who live at great distance from Moscow, the journals are currently the only source of contemporary literature that is readily available to them. Subscription problems aside, the journals at least send copies to the provinces, which is more than some of the Moscow-based publishers have achieved. The commercial function of literature has also affected writers. Long gone are the days when writers could rely on generous state subsidies that paid them far more than other professions for much less work. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the arrival of a capitalist-style economy forced many writers to make a decision: write works that appealed to readers that publishers wanted to sell, or leave the profession of writing entirely. Writers in Russia now find themselves in a comparable position with writers in other countries – only the lucky few are able to earn enough money to write ‘full-time’. For the majority, writing fiction has become something that they must fit around other forms of employment and there has also to be some consideration that what they produce must be of interest to a sufficient number of readers to make a publisher even consider producing it. To some degree, it seems that the political censorship of the Soviet period has been replaced by the commercial censorship of the market economy.

Without question, the end of political control meant that literature could have a commercial function, yet the political dimension cannot be ignored and continues to influence many aspects of the production and consumption of literature, even in the post-Soviet era. In spite of so-called political freedom, politics continues to have an effect on some aspects of literary production in Russia, from both an ideological standpoint and in terms of content. The funding that the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications provided to publishers can be seen as both positive and negative. Had state support not been granted when it was requested in the mid-1990s, it is very possible that independent, private publishers would not have survived and the state would have held a monopoly over printed materials, no doubt prompting accusations of a return to ideological manipulation. Furthermore, the continued funding that the state offers to publishers (who are not forced to accept it) is to ensure that commercial censorship is not absolute and that texts which may be significant, but of interest only to a limited audience, are published. However, the rhetoric that outlines which sorts of texts qualify for political sponsorship sounds as if it has been lifted directly from the pages of Soviet instruction manuals on the types

of writing which were permissible in the Soviet era. Yet once again, perhaps this is not surprising given that as recently as 2004 many of those employed in the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications were the same people who had been in similar positions since the Soviet era and therefore could not be expected to operate in a fashion different from that which they had been used. While it is impossible not to question the state's motivation for providing funding for certain types of text, there is little evidence to suggest that such support is a method for trying to influence what people are reading. However, the commercialisation of literature means that there are numerous alternatives available for those who want to read something that has no association with the state. Perhaps what is of greater concern is the state's decision not to continue supporting the literary journal *21st-Century Volga* on the premise that some content was 'unpatriotic' in its reflection of Russia. The initial requests that the text in question be edited, followed by the complete ban on the material and subsequent closure of the journal is reminiscent of Soviet-style censorship and altogether more worrying. Although such instances of state censorship of literature appear to be relatively rare, there are those who believe that literature is currently the only free medium left in Russia at the moment and it remains to be seen how long government interference can be resisted by publishers and writers alike. Of course, there is also the possibility that writers are already self-censoring their works to ensure that there is nothing controversial in their pages which would cause over-cautious publishers not to print them.

As to state influence over the content of literature, it is much harder to establish to what extent there is government involvement. There is no doubt that the Putin era saw a rise in texts that bore some reference to the new president and that for some commentators this fascination, and apparent adoration, represented something akin to the early stages of a 'cult of personality'. Concerns about a new post-Soviet 'cult of personality' stemmed from the evidence which hinted at state involvement in the planning and funding of several activities that were allegedly spontaneous. In contrast, there are those who assert that the interest in Putin grew from a lack of information about who he was prior to his appointment as president and that any work that mentions him is merely an attempt by the publisher and author to take advantage of the public's insatiable desire to know more about the nation's president from 2000. The emergence of works that satirised Putin's actions or which painted his actions as those belonging to a ruthless and calculating man could be viewed as a challenge to the state, harking back to the Soviet era, when one of literature's key roles was to question the state's actions and those in power.

However, such texts appear to cause the government relatively little consternation, probably because any attack that they do make on the leadership is relatively mild. Thus there are no apparent moves to prevent such publications.

The political function of literature is not the only area in which former state policies and attitudes continue to colour the role that literature has played between 1996 and 2008. The desire to provide the masses with instructional reading matter began in the 1800s, demonstrating that the belief that literature should serve an educational function was not unique to the Soviet period and is a notion that has been perpetuated throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. In spite of assertions that they strive only to entertain the reader, many writers sought to provide answers to questions which the public encountered after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The ideological remit of this educational function may have been replaced with a far more practical purpose, but writers have found that readers persist in turning to them for answers to questions about life in post-Soviet Russia and that as the country continues to change, there is always scope for literature to offer solutions to the problems that such changes bring. It could be argued that the emergence of popular literature is representative of the educational function of literature and that if a topic appears in popular literature then it cannot be a serious question that is causing readers consternation. However, the abundance of popular literary genres which have remained and evolved over time suggests that readers are very happy to search for answers to their questions about life in these types of texts and furthermore, that they expect these works to offer them something more than escapism and an interesting story. Indeed, using popular literature to provide insights into the 'big questions' makes the answers to these questions more accessible than when they are hidden under numerous layers of meaning in 'high' literature and comprehensible only to those who have the right educational background to decode the ideas.

This increased accessibility to complex questions and answers has affected the way in which literature is discussed in the post-Soviet period. Academics, critics and politicians were previously accountable for ensuring that the population read only the right sorts of material and read it in the right way. The period from 1996-2008 has seen critics and intellectuals struggle with both the decline in the numbers who read and the quality of what has been written. Readers do not have to listen to a small group who are 'qualified' to make critical assessments on the latest novels and plays. Many newspapers include reviews of popular literature and bookshops

use the reviews printed in the 'glossies' as a selling technique to convince customers. Furthermore, critics are no longer in a position to make or break a writer's career. Publishers seek to ensure that the writers that they publish receive sufficient promotion to guarantee sales and good PR or a slick marketing campaign is of far greater value than praise from a 'traditional' critic. The critic's power is further diminished by the growth of writing that appears on the internet, which effectively allows any reader to become a critic. Celebrities and well-known personalities pass comment on books that they have enjoyed, books are promoted alongside other household goods as one of many ways to spend one's leisure time and the 'average' reader is able to influence the types of books that are published – after all his or her buying habits inform publishers' lists.

The collapse of Communism has allowed something of a democratisation of literature and this has fuelled discussion about literature and its value. It seems that, in spite of concerns about a 'crisis' in post-Soviet literature in the early 1990s, the Russian literary scene remains vibrant and that, although the place of literature may be different, it is still considered central to Russia's cultural heritage. Perhaps, as Vasilevsky (cited in Voznesensky 2005) suggests, the time has come to stop 'harping on about not having any kind of literature, that everything is terrible, that writers are bad and that poetry is in crisis' and to celebrate the fact that, 'contrary to the comments of the last fifteen years, Russia does have its own literature and in fact, it is good literature'.

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